ELNATHAN.

A ROMANCE.

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ELNATHAN;

[illegible] 1830

OR,

THE AGES OF MAN.

An Historical Romance.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY A PHILOSOPHER.

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages. SHAKESPEARE.

VOL. II.

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ELNATHAN;

OR,

THE AGES OF MAN.

BOOK V.

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The Period when Man thinks of his future Establishment.

"FAREWELL, my friends," said Bethuel to Ezriel and Anna, "my hour is come to quit this life; nor should I regret a scene where pain so largely preponderates over pleasure, and where, at best, every enjoyment is dearly purchased. Waste not your precious time, I beseech you, in regretting me; but repair often to my tomb, and share over it your bread and wine with the indigent: thus will my salvation be perfected.—Ezriel, Anna, I have no other counsel to leave you; you are my superiors in wis-

dom and piety. Farewell; we shall meet ere long." Bethuel now raised her thoughts with fervour to Heaven, and some moments after expired, in the arms of Ezriel and Anna.

They performed her funeral rites with every demonstration of respect and affection: alternately they offered the oblations over her tomb that she had requested; nor did they dare to shed tears to her memory, so certain were they that eternal happiness would be the reward of her life of innocence, and of her pious end.

The day following that on which Bethuel expired, and some hours after Elnathan and Zabdi had quitted Babylon, even at the period of the autumnal equinox, the heavens gave sign of a second deluge: the tempest howled, the thunder rolled, and torrents of rain poured upon the earth; the Tigris and Euphrates overflowed their banks, and, during eight days, inundated the surrounding country: the devastation was dreadful; the

the inhabitants of the vallies, while they hastened for safety to the mountains, beheld their flocks, and even their habitations, swept away.

Abessalom, with patriarchal foresight, hastened, some hours before the waters had gained his domains, to advertise all his vassals to repair, with their families and most precious effects, to the mountains situated to the north: thus was he assured of the safety of all, except Naaman and the shepherdess Martha, who, at the moment of general migration, were no where to be found.

This thoughtless couple, who delighted in each other's society, had, at an unfortunate moment, rambled from home in search of wild fruits; and were prevented from returning, by the rapid increase of the flood. They remained stationary on two neighbouring heights, distant from each other about forty perches, and between which the waters rushed in an impetuous torrent. On the top of the emi-

nence which Naaman had been suddenly forced to gain, was a little shed, which served occasionally as a shelter for the shepherds; and within it was a store of fruit and vegetables, that some of them had lately left there. But, alas! on the spot where Martha was placed, was only a small hay-rick: on the top of this she had taken refuge; but presently the waters rose so high, that its foundation became sapped, and it was in momentary danger of being scattered on their surface. The terrified shepherdess stretched out her arms to Naaman for succour, who made several vain attempts to swim towards her; but the current was too strong, and he was obliged each time to regain his former station.

"Ah, generous friend!" cried Martha, at length, "do not endanger thy life farther! Comfort, I beseech thee, my father and sister!" At this moment she was swept away, and perished in the flood.

This was the last victim sacrificed to

the

the fury of the elements: the heavens became suddenly serene, the waters gradually decreased, and the rainbow gave token of returning calm. By the rays of a bright moon, afflicted mortals could weep their losses, and perform the rites of sepulture over such of their friends as had fallen victims to the late ravages.

Naaman hastened to seek the form of her he loved; he perceived it erect, between two poplar trees: his heart beat with the hope that life yet animated it; but soon was he deceived, and as soon did fresh sorrow take possession of his bosom. He lifted the corse of Martha in his arms, and carried it to the habitation of her father, from whence it was deposited in the earth, amidst general lamentation. But the real tomb of the amiable Martha was the heart of Naaman, from whence her image never departed, whilst he remained on earth.

It was three weeks before Elnathan and Zabdi, who had taken refuge in the en-

virons of Babylon, were able to reach home. The roads, as they advanced, were rendered so difficult to pass, that, for greater speed, they quitted their cars and attendants, and proceeded on foot. The night had closed in, when they came within sight of their native valley. How their hearts beat with impatience to know the fate of Sephora and Mara, whom they had neglected to inquire for during more than three months! Alas! they felt that they scarcely deserved to see them again, or yet to find them constant!—Let not their filial tenderness be too severely taxed, when it is known that their footsteps were first bent towards the dwelling of Chœreas. They crept softly along the hedge that surrounded his orchard, in hopes of hearing the voices of their mistresses, and of being convinced that they had escaped the late dangers that visited the land. On this subject they were presently assured; for Sephora and Mara, with Naaman and Saaph, were seated within

within an arbour close by, and engaged in a conversation, which was listened to by Elnathan and Zabdi.

"Ah! the ungrateful mortals!" said Sephora; "did they indeed suppose that report would fail to inform us of the prostitution of their hearts at the shrine of vanity and false allurement?—But, for my part, Naaman, my resolution is taken; and I again repeat to you, that I will repair to Eleana, and, even before Ezriel, proffer a vow of eternal celibacy: having lost him whom, from my childhood, I so tenderly loved, nothing is left for me but to devote myself entirely to Heaven. I have even prepared every thing for my journey; and you, Naaman, with a faithful servant, will attend me."

"Not so either," replied Mara; "for I will prevent your extravagant project, by immediately acquainting your mother of it. Believe me, you would repent your rashness ere long; and you would find, that Heaven would not have power

to shut out former recollection from your bosom. Now, *my* plan of vengeance is quite different from yours, which would tend alone to your own punishment: I mean to console myself, as soon as possible, with another lover. There is Naaman; I think he could not do better than cease to weep the amiable Martha, and listen to the consolations I might afford him; yes, we should console each other, and——"

"What folly you run on with!" said Sephora.

"Ah! very well," replied Mara; "I only wish that my folly and yours were properly compared."

Whether the air was too sharp, or that the effusions of Mara tended to impede the respiration of Zaodi, is uncertain; but, at this moment, he gently hemmed; upon which Sephora arose—"Let us separate," said she; "I almost fear we have been overheard."

"Farewell, my friends, till to morrow,

till to-morrow, at breakfast-time," said Mara.

The friends parted, and retired to their respective homes.

Elnathan and Zabdi now hastened to the dwelling of their good parents, who received them with the sincerest joy; for though Abessalom and Noëma had heard with regret of their late deviations, the season was over when their frown of reproof, as formerly, should settle on their brows; their sons were now men, no longer to be guided by their hopes and fears, but by the conviction of their reason. The voice of authority was therefore dropped, and Abessalom and Noëma conversed with them, on all occasions, as friends, interested, above all others, in their welfare and happiness. After this manner did they talk to Elnathan and Zabdi of their late adventures, and endeavour to convince them where most lay their errors; they also congratulated

them, upon their timely departure from Babylon.

Having visited and discoursed with their parents, our heroes longed, above all things, to humble themselves before Sephora and Mara, and to regain, if possible, their esteem. The morning following their arrival had scarcely begun to dawn, when Elnathan said to Zabdi, "Let us even join the breakfast-party that was resolved on last night within our hearing, and prevent the completion of those violent measures meditated by Sephora and Mara, and which would shroud with mourning the rest of our days."

Zabdi agreed, though with some trepidation; and the brothers sought the dwelling of Chœreas, even as he, Susanna, and the little party that conversed in the orchard the preceding evening, were assembled for breakfast. As they appeared, general consternation prevailed, and salutations, rather awkward, were exchanged;

ged; these were succeeded by silence, which Mara, however, was the first to break—"May I ask," said she archly, addressing Zabdi, "how your arm does that was so badly fractured in presence of all the Babylonians? as also, whether the brilliant career you then run, obtained you a prize equal to those you obtained at Delphi?"

Zabdi was unable to reply; and all parties remained, for some moments, ill at ease; for Chœreas and Susanna (who used to smile in silence on the mutual inclination of Elnathan and Sephora) hearing of his magnificence at Babylon, now considered him in the light of a great man, who came to bestow a nod of protection, on his vassals: Sephora having also lately confided to them his promise of making her his wife, their embarrassment was augmented.

"How comes it, my dear friends," said Elnathan, at length addressing Chœreas and Susanna, "that you no longer

receive

receive us as formerly? Joy no longer beams on your countenances for our return."

"Sir," said Chœreas, "while you were only a youth, it was not wrong to treat you with familiarity; but years have added much to your dignity, and it is only fit our tone should alter, and that we should duly acknowledge the pre-eminence of your birth and fortune."

"Ah!" replied Elnathan, "the true reason is, that you loved and esteemed the youth, while the man is despised by you. But reflect, Chœreas, how false is report; how it exaggerates defeats, as well as triumphs; how it delights in novelty, and loves to fill the air with empty sounds."

"I agree," replied Chœreas, "that report often mocks us; but when it reiterates the same sounds for months together, it is scarcely to be doubted. But I do not pretend to say that it has reported aught of you of which you may not

not be proud; it has represented you within our humble dwellings, as partly composing the council of the empire, as the friend of its generals, of a mighty prince."

"And of a mighty princess too," added Mara—"But prithee let us have some breakfast; there is no use in arguing; we must e'en take men as we find them."

"You are very good indeed," said Zabdi, piqued, "to take men as you find them, while, at the same time, they are exactly such as they promised to be, and such as they are determined ever to remain. Nothing, I repeat, can ever shake the constancy of your friends who have just appeared; their hearts and their senses remain pure as ever. I should like to see you, charming Mara, within the theatre at Babylon; I doubt much but you would find there sufficient to console you for the absence of a sincere and tender friend, and that you would encounter more serious danger than a fracture in the

the arm; yes, you would irrecoverably lose your heart; while Elnathan, plunged in the midst of a brilliant court, and I, exposed to the allurements of a lovely actress, have both been able to preserve ours untouched. Ah! yes, my lovely friends, had you been exposed to such a whirlwind——"

"We should at least," said Mara, "have prevented it from sweeping away the pen that was destined to calm the anxiety of friendship."

Sabdi was going to reply.

"Come, come, my dear brother," said Elnathan, "let us conclude this painful conversation. If it is consistent with true affection to be mistrustful, it is also just that true constancy should be duly crowned."

Sephora raised her eyes towards Elnathan, who understood the tenderness of their language.

"Farewell—the journey to Eleana," whispered Mara, as she perceived the glance

glance of Sephora—"Come," added she, in a louder tone, "let us all be friends, and regale on those nice cakes and honey."

The party drew round the table, all but Naaman, who wandered into the orchard to hold converse with his grief. Cheerfulness presided at this rural repast; and at its conclusion, Elnathan and Zabdi ventured to press the hands of their mistresses, in token of perfect reconcilement. Mara now led the way to the dwelling of her mother, whom indisposition had for some time retained at home.

Moria expressed great joy on once more seeing Elnathan and Zabdi, and regretted that she was very soon to leave home—"I am going," said she, "with my dear Mara, to seek renovation from the famous waters of Bera, situated southwest of Babylon; but you, my friends, no doubt are come to sojourn some time in this neighbourhood; so that, I trust, we shall all meet again in little more than

a month,

a month, when I propose returning. We shall then have the happiness of retracing the pleasures of former days."

"I will not offer to accompany you," said Elnathan, "because I am aware that you would be the first to represent to me, that, after an absence of three years, it would appear unkind to leave my parents. But I trust you will accept of the equipage and attendants of Zabdi and me, to conduct you to Bera; and suffer also that they shall attend you on your return home. We left them behind us on the road from Babylon; but I expect their arrival in a few hours."

Moria gratefully accepted the offer of Elnathan; and, provided all was in readiness, she fixed her departure for the next day.

Their baggage and suite presently arrived, when the sons of Abessalom hastened to unfold the various presents with which they had been loaded at the court of the great king.

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The most valuable were offered to their parents, to Chœreas, Susanna, and Moria. Their Scythian friends were next thought of; and what now remained of their gifts, were distributed amongst others of their neighbours. Two purses filled with gold coin, were sent to Ezriel and to Zambri, for the relief of indigent travellers.

Munificence and liberality have not power certainly to awaken love within ingenuous bosoms; but the love that is already fixed, and has met a return, glows with new ardour for the worthy employ made of riches by its object.

After a thousand protestations of constancy unshaken, made, during two days, to Sephora and Mara by their amiable lovers, how was it possible that the daughter of Chœreas and Susanna should not renounce her intended vow at Eleana, in the hope of spending the remainder of her life with Elnathan? how was it also possible for Mara not to give her solemn

promise

promise to think no more of consolation with other than Zabdi?

The season of autumn, so delightful for the Chaldeans, as succeeding the scorching rays of summer, was now advanced, when Moria and her daughter departed for Bera. They were attended, according to agreement, by two servants of Elnathan and Zabdi, and placed in a car, chosen from amongst others for its superior convenience. Their route, however, was but imperfectly traced; so that, at the end of three days journeying, they found themselves considerably astray: they were even now, ere the close of day, bewildered in a large forest; nor knew they which path would lead them aright. After various windings, they perceived, at the extremity of a long alley, the summit of an obelisk, which peeped from amongst the trees: immediately the travellers hastened towards it, in hopes of gaining some instructions how they were

to

to proceed. Upon approaching nearer, they found the edifice thickly surrounded with cypress trees; upon which Moria and her daughter descended from their car, and proceeded through a small entrance leading to the interior of this little domain. The scene was so solitary and gloomy, that Mara would have receded; but her mother still advanced, and perceived, to her surprise, that the cypress plantation encircled a monument. On its base she decyphered this inscription:—

"Here repose the ashes of Gersom and Jamin. Their fate must remain a sad and tender mystery."

"What have I read!" exclaimed Moria wildly, and sank senseless to the earth. Mara, in the utmost alarm, fell on the neck of her mother, whose present state, she believed, proceeded from a tedious course of indisposition. Her cries summoned the attendants, who wait, at a little distance, beside the car. They arrive—

but

but Moria revives not: upon which they disperse in various directions, to seek relief for the invalid. At this moment, a venerable man appeared at the opposite side of the hedge which surrounded the tomb, and advanced to the spot where the affectionate Mara leaned over the pale and stiffened form of Moria—"Whoever thou art," said she, "for mercy sake, lend to me some means to reanimate the tenderest, best of mothers!"

The old man happened to be provided with some aromatic essence, which he applied to the temples of the sufferer, whilst Mara chafed her hands with some of the same. Presently Moria heaved a deep sigh; and in a few moments more, unclosed her eyes. They fell upon the old man, and immediately after closed, while she exclaimed—"Oh, my God! touched with my long suffering and repentance, thou hast deigned to call me to thyself, even into the presence of my father, whose death no doubt my errors were

were the cause of!—Oh, my dear father! since we meet in heaven, thou dost surely forgive thy child!"

"What do I hear? what do I see?" cried the old man—"Moria! my dear Moria! open thy eyes; thy father yet lives; yes, he presses thee in his arms!"

Moria suddenly raised herself up, looked round, as if collecting her scattered senses, and falling at the feet of Saphat, cried—"Oh, my father! am I indeed so happy to bathe thy hands with my tears?" Then turning towards the fatal tomb, she also wept over it; and raised a pious ejaculation to Heaven, in favour of the souls of Gersom and Jamin.

"Let us quit this spot," said Saphat; and, aided by Mara, he raised up his daughter, and was leading her in an opposite direction from that by which she had entered the enclosure.

"But our attendants," said the astonished Mara, "are gone in quest of succour, and, on their return, will not know where

where to find us: our car, too, stands in yonder alley."

Saphat then directed an aged man, who, at the cry of danger, had followed him, and whose appearance betrayed him to be a hermit, to remain, and assure the servants of the safety of their mistresses—"Have the goodness," added he, "to conduct them, with the horses and equipage, to my palace at Ithamar, where I shall repair before noon to-morrow."

Then supporting Moria on his right arm, while his left was offered to Mara, he led the way through the various windings of a thicket, till he came to the entrance of a hermitage, situated in a verdant recess of wood and rocks. This solitary retreat was furnished with every necessary comfort for constant residence, and appeared a safe shelter from every earthly care.

Arrived within the dwelling, Moria again knelt before her father—"Allow me," said she, "to implore thy benediction

tion even for my daughter, whom I behold nearly overcome by the sudden and unforeseen adventure she has witnessed, and of which she was in part the cause; suffer her, my father, to know and revere thee; she is indeed worthy of your parental solicitude."

Saphat bestowed a tender benediction on each of his children, and raised them from the ground; for Mara, from her mother's signal, also knelt before him.

"My dear child," said Moria, "thou shalt, ere long, be instructed in the story of my life; at present be content to know, that thy father reposes within that tomb, the sudden discovery of which was more than my senses could tranquilly support."

Saphat now proposed that Moria should take a short repose, and endeavour to calm her spirits; while it should be his care to acquaint Mara with the principal events of her mother's life, which, it appeared, she was yet ignorant of.

Moria cheerfully acceded to this proposal, and retired to an interior cell, where a humble couch presented itself for her use. She was desirous that her daughter should learn the strange circumstances of her birth, and she was also glad to be spared the agony of confiding them.

Mara was equally surprised and affected with the relation of Saphat; still did the knowledge of her mother's misfortunes serve but to endear her the more to her.

Returned with her grandfather beside Moria (whose heart swelled with joy at being restored in amity to her father), the good man took a hand of each—"No sooner, my dear child," said he, "did I receive your last farewell, than I flew and poured my griefs into the bosom of my sovereign. He pitied them, and immediately ordered the corses of the two victims to be embalmed, and concealed within the tomb next which they fell, until a suitable one was erected for

for them. He next granted to me a tract of two hundred acres within this forest, with permission to erect within it the tomb you have seen, and there deposit in state your husband and lover. To forward the plan, I applied to Eubulus, the old man you have seen with me, and who was skilled in architecture: he lived a retired life in Babylon, and his talents were only employed in the service of friendship, or in behalf of the indigent. He readily agreed to accompany me hither; when, under his eye, was completed the meditated work. He took so much pleasure, however, in this solitary scene, and his wishes tended so strongly to pass in it, far from noise and strife, the remainder of his days, that I transferred to him with pleasure the grant of the king, with the sole reservation of being able occasionally to share his solitude, and thence gain composure and fortitude sufficient to bear my sorrows without murmuring. I have yet ne-

glected to tell you, that immediately after my audience of the king, I endeavoured to trace your flight; but this proving ineffectual, I was led to conclude, with the whole city of Hanothmir, that you had put an end to your unfortunate existence. Judge what it must have cost me to become reconciled to the idea, the idea of never more beholding you, who had hitherto been the pride and pleasure of my life!—About fifteen years ago, I was elected by Nebuchadnezzar to the chief magistracy of the kingdom; nor did I refuse the honour, in the hope of benefiting my countrymen, and also of securing the favour of the king towards the grandson of my favourite sister, who was just entering upon life. This young man is, even now, at Ithamar; he enjoys wealth and honours, and will, I am sure, be easily brought to form a union, Moria, with your daughter."

Mara was too sincere, and too fondly attached

attached to Zabdi, to suffer her grandfather to indulge an illusion that could never be realized—" I should," said she quickly, " be wanting in that love and respect which Nature and your words inspire me with, my revered parent, were I here to forbear acquainting you, that an attachment commenced from my infancy, and even but a few days since finally declared, inhabits my bosom, for the most amiable and enlightened of mortals, I might add, the most disinterested in Chaldea. This is no other than the adopted son of the celebrated Abessalom, and the natural one of the high-priest Zambri. Similar circumstances, it appears, presided over the birth of Zabdi and myself, and have tended perhaps to unite our hearts; for if I was denied the pleasure of ever seeing my father, it never was given to him to know his mother. You will then surely never cause me to regret being subjected to your authority."

 " I think

"I think I am acquainted with Zabdi," said Saphat—"Is he not the adopted brother and friend of Elnathan?"

"The same, my father."

"He has the reputation, I confess," said Saphat, "of being loyal, wise, and polished; his exterior, too, is noble and prepossessing."

"Oh! him indeed!" said Mara.

"And where is he at present?" asked Saphat.

"In the spot that gave him birth, even in that fertile land where the Tigris approaches the Euphrates, and only to wander from it ere they lose themselves, by nearly one common mouth, in the Persian Gulf."

"Well, my child, have patience," said Saphat; "your hopes may yet be realized."

Moria, encouraged by this implied consent of her father, hastened to relate for him the events of her life for the last nineteen years, during which she was separated

parated from him; above all, did she dwell on the friendship and benevolence shewn her by Izriel, Abessalom, and Noëma, and indeed by every inhabitant of the valley where she had fixed her retreat; yet she had to add, that the poignancy of her regrets, heightened by not once daring to inquire for the author of her being (though every traveller might have informed her of his destination), had alone embittered every enjoyment, and had at length so impaired her health that she was counselled by her friends to try the waters of Bera, whose source she was seeking when the divine favour directed that she should lose her way within the forest, thus to procure to her the supreme blessing of meeting her father once more.

" Ah, my child!" said Saphat, " we might have met sooner! thou needst not to have feared my reproaches; my pity rather would ever have been thy portion."

Saphat now informed Moria, that the famous spring of Bera was but one parasang and a half from the castle of Ithamar, where the king had appointed him to reside, and where he intended that she and her daughter should repair with him early the following morning, it being only five parasangs from where they now were—"Come," said he, "let us share some refreshment within this humble habitation, where we will repose to-night, that you, my daughter, may recruit your strength. You and Mara shall have my couch, while I will take that of Eubulus, in the next cell."

It may be imagined that, in a moment of such uncommon interest, the soul engrossed every call of appetite and of sleep, and that both for this night were nearly disregarded.

Very early in the morning, Saphat prepared a humble car drawn by one horse, in which he always privately sought his retirement in the forest: in

this

this he placed Moria and her daughter, and also contrived for himself a seat in front, by which he could drive them to his magnificent abode at Ithamar, which Nature and Art concurred to render almost a scene of enchantment.

This happy trio found there the servants of Elnathan awaiting their arrival, and Eubulus at the outer gate, ready to receive them. Mara, whose tastes were of the simplest nature, was astonished at the magnificence of the scene that now presented itself, forming such a contrast to the humble cottage and rustic scenery she had been brought up in. Saphat presently introduced her and Moria to his nephew, of whom he had already spoken. The young man, though possessing few graces of person, was in his manners pleasing and accomplished, while a disposition the most amiable inhabited his bosom. He saw, without any tincture of jealousy, the arrival of Moria, and heartily shared the joy of her and

 Saphat,

Saphat, for their happy and unexpected meeting. Mara returned his salutation with warmth, in the hope, however, that he was never to counteract her plans of happiness with Zabdi. Still, though firmly attached, she possessed a spirit of coquetry, that made her delight in exciting the fears and jealousy of her lover: to this end, she traced, in a letter to Noöma, the unexpected splendour with which she was surrounded, as also the proposal of her grandfather, to unite her with her wealthy and accomplished cousin. After including a request to Noëma, that her letter might be communicated to Abessalom and his sons, she delivered it to the attendants of Elnathan and Zabdi, who, astonished at the generosity of Saphat towards them, but, above all, that Mara should be the kinswoman of so distinguished a personage, returned to their masters, boasting of the wonders they had beheld.

The inquietude of Zabdi was not a little

little awakened, as, returning from a visit of eight days to Zambri, he was made acquainted with every thing that had befallen Mara. He impatiently inquired of his servants (who gaily iterated descriptions that tormented him) when they were to return, to bring Moria home? His disappointment, however, was complete, when they told him that they had been dismissed without any orders to repair again to Ithamar, or even to seek the travellers at Bera.

Elnathan was scarcely better off than Zabdi. Cyprus had written to Abessalom, that, in consideration of the eminent services he had rendered Somer, she had obtained for his son the command of the eleventh legion in the army of the empire, and had also in view for him a brilliant marriage with the daughter of the commander in chief. The queen requested of Abessalom a speedy answer, as she was desirous that this projected union should be completed before

the expiration of the year of absence solicited by Elnathan on his quitting Babylon.

Noëma was but little elated by this letter: reflecting on the dangers her son had encountered next Cyprus, she much feared that this illustrious marriage was intended by the princess as a means to retain Elnathan near her, and to continue her empire over him. She agreed with her husband to let their son alone decide on what answer should be returned to the letter of the queen, which they at length put into his hands.

As he was on the point of reading it, Abessalom said to him—"My son, you are endowed with wisdom and virtue sufficient to be your own guide. This letter concerns the happiness or misery of your future days. Let me, however, warn you, that though wisdom does not exact of you to impose an unnatural restraint upon your tenderest inclinations, it requires that you should, by every possible means,

means, avoid giving offence to those destined to rule over us, particularly as you are intended for a public career, and that your views aim at serving your country. Remember the words of Solomon, who saith—'*The wrath of kings waxeth unto death.*' I am ready, however, to write whatever answer you please to dictate to Cyprus."

Elnathan perused the letter with fixed attention, and then remained for some moments silent—"It is even your will, my father," said he, at length—"please to write, and I will dictate."

Abessalom complied, and wrote as follows:—

"*Abessalom, and Noëma his Wife, to their high and mighty Sovereign:*

"OUR hearts, mighty princess, have long overflowed with gratitude, for the many favours you have deigned to bestow on our son Elnathan; but

but how can we sufficiently express that we feel for the great and honourable employment you have lastly procured him? He will endeavour to prove, in the exercise of his new dignity, how devoted are his life and talents to the service of his prince, and how poignant is his gratitude to thee, great queen. The brilliant union you generously propose, happily does not offer to him the same means of acknowledging thy favours: he avows to us, that his tenderest inclinations have been, from his earliest years, engaged; and he prays you not to strip your favours of their greatest charm—the hope of sharing them with the young Sephora, born within our village, of estimable parents, and, to unite himself to whom, he solicits our consent. He is, however, ready to resign the flattering post to which you have appointed him, as also the only union from which he can expect happiness, should he not obtain, in favour of it, the consent of the greatest

of

of kings*, and the most gracious of queens."

"And now it is time," said Elnathan, throwing himself at the feet of Abessalom and Noëma, "that I should indeed solicit your consent to what alone can render me happy."

His parents raised him up, and kindly assured him of their ready consent to his wishes.

The answer to the queen, signed by Abessalom and Noëma, was dispatched the same day by the messenger of Cyprus: and now, how anxiously was his return once more expected! In the meanwhile, Zabdi alone was made acquainted with the passing negociation.

At the end of three weeks, the painful uncertainty of Elnathan was at an end, and he had the satisfaction of receiving

* The time was now come, when Nebuchadnezzar had reassumed his natural form.

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the consent of his sovereign to his espousals with Sephora: his military appointment was also confirmed to him.

With rapture did he hasten beside Chœreas and Susanna, to request they would add their consent to that of his parents and his king, to his union with Sephora.

"The wishes of our daughter," said they, "shall be ours."

Sephora was now sought for; and, until she arrived, the heart of Elnathan palpitated to no common measure. Though hitherto certain of the affection of his mistress, his happiness was so great at the approach of the decisive moment that was to seal their vows, that he almost trembled lest it should escape him.

"My daughter," said Chœreas, as Sephora entered, "here is a day of great importance for you—Elnathan, authorised by Abessalom and Noëma, seeks you as his wife. Consult not our pleasure on the occasion, neither let yourself be dazzled by the brilliancy of the offer;

your

your heart alone must be interrogated: to whatever resolution it influences you, we shall readily agree."

Blushes suffused the countenance of Sephora, while joy sparkled in her eyes —"Oh, my God!" said she, after a moment's pause, and raising her eyes to Heaven, "deign to look with favour on the sacrifice which, encouraged by my parents, I am willing to make to Elnathan of my liberty!" She then knelt in gratitude before Chœreas and Susanna, who raising her up, placed her right hand within that of Elnathan, as the assured token of the future union of this interesting couple.

This ceremony had scarcely taken place, when three cavaliers, superbly attired, on richly-caparisoned steeds, successively arrive at the door of Abessalom, to announce the immediate approach of Saphat, with his daughter Moria (who had just returned from Bera, having received much benefit from the waters),

and

and his granddaughter Mara. At sound of this news, Zabdi, with a palpitating heart, flew and concealed himself under the roof of Naaman and Saaph: presently a magnificent car, drawn by six horses, is heard rolling through the valley, and at length stopping before the dwelling of his adopted father; yet preserving, on this trying occasion, a remnant of that timidity which had distinguished his youth, and which a masculine education had not been able intirely to conquer, he scarcely dared to peep through the window of his retreat, to steal a glance at the triumphal car, containing the object of his tenderest regard, her mother, and grandfather.

Elnathan hastened to embrace his old friends; and Abessalom respectfully saluting Saphat, conducts him to his principal apartment, the same in which twenty-four years previously, he had entertained the good Somer. The magistrate received his attentions, and those of

the

the rest of his family, with grateful complacency; and, in affecting accents, adverted to the unforeseen event of finding his daughter, for whom the unlimited kindness of Abessalom deserved, he added, with tears in his eyes, the utmost acknowledgments of her father.

Still Zabdi was absent; and Saphat desired much to see him. He was sought for, but without success. Who that is not aware of the puerilities of which love is guilty, could suppose that Zabdi, accounted wise as a courtier, and brave as a military leader, could have yet more anxiously concealed himself in a cave, strictly forbidding his Scythian friends to discover him?

"I will seek him myself," said Abessalom, secretly doubting the timidity of Zabdi. He went immediately to the house of Osa, which he had seen the fugitive enter not long before—"Where is my son?" said he to Naaman, who was reading to amuse his mother.

"Elnathan

tor, to present you with a gentle shepherdess; make of her a happy wife;" and Saphat led Mara forward.

Zabdi hardly knew if he was awake, or whether he might not be in the midst of the most delightful dream, within the cave of Osa. He looked around him, without knowing what to answer; when Saphat, placing the hand of Mara within his, said—"With the consent of your respective parents, my children, which I have been careful to obtain, promise to be each other's comfort and support through life, previous to the moment when holy rites shall bless your union.

At this moment Zambri, who had been warned of this scene, entered; when, in the presence of all most dear to them, the delighted lovers vowed to consecrate their mutual constancy at the foot of the altar.

Saphat immediately after dispatched a courier to Babylon, to gain the consent of the king to this union; while Abessalom

lom wrote to Ezriel an account of the different occurrences which had prepared the espousals of Elnathan and Zabdi with Sephora and Mara: he conjured him also to return, in the conveyance he purposely sent, to his former solitude on mount Anoth, there to bless the union of his children, whose wisdom, virtue, and happiness, were, in a great part, his (Ezriel's) work.

Nebuchadnezzar quickly returned a gracious answer to the request of Saphat; and Ezriel having repaired, about the same period, to the holy temple he had founded on mount Anoth, it was agreed by our party, that, on the day when the sun was to enter the sign of Sagittarius, they should proceed within the sanctuary, to strengthen, by the sacred chains of religion, those ties already formed by love and social concord.

Saphat required that this ceremony should be performed as privately as possible, to prevent those unhappy circum-

stances which presided at the birth of Zabdi and Mara from being canvassed by idle curiosity, and exciting perhaps malicious sarcasms on their mutual origin; it was indeed the will of Elnathan, that unmingled joy should, in common, be the portion of him and Zabdi, at the celebration of their long wished-for nuptials.

Ezriel, at the appointed moment, appeared at the door of the temple of mount Anoth, and received the grateful acknowledgments of Saphat, for the parental kindness he had shewn his daughter. Besides the venerable magistrate and their respective parents, the affianced couples were attended by Naaman, Saaph, with Mesron his beloved shepherdess, and the virtuous Ora, whose steps every one contended to guide, his sight being entirely gone. Ezriel led the way to the altar, which was decorated with wreaths of laurel and myrtle; and having ascended its steps, he laid his right hand on the heads

of

of the lovers, who knelt before him, and in quality of minister of the Most High, received their reciprocal vows of mutual fidelity. He then raised them up, and, in a solemn tone, pronounced these words:—

"That almighty Being, who is eternal and indivisible, found pleasure in placing man upon the earth, at some distance from the heavens, as a mirror to reflect his own image. Though free to choose, numerous of the species voluntarily encounter the dark and noxious mists of a surrounding atmosphere, and are thence precipitated into endless abysses; others, who, by a constant effort, embrace those celestial rays dispensed by the Creator to preserve their lustre, and chase away all tarnishing vapours, are certain of being again confounded with that brilliant centre from whence they originally emanated. Without doubt, it is sublime to return to God a soul unpolluted by any

secondary affection; but, since our mortal affections tend to the perpetuating beings, like us, partaking of the divine essence they are worthy of being encouraged by the ministers of Heaven. It is then with a cheerful conscience, my dear children, that, having instructed you in charity and its associated virtues, I have proceeded to bless, in the name of the Most High, your pure and lovely union. May your offspring one day be worthy to sink with you into the ocean of eternal felicity!—What an ocean, oh sovereign Benefactor!—There to share the immensity of thy wisdom, to see unveiled the infinite art with which thou governest this beauteous earth, to taste, from age to age, without languor or satiety, without regret of the past or fear of the future, of ineffable delights, delights of which our highest enjoyments here below are but weak sparks; to be penetrated with love of all that surrounds us,

us, because all will be thee, ever and ever!—Oh, my God! It is with joy I plunge into this adorable eternity!"

Ezriel is silent, and leans immoveable, his face covered with his hands, upon the altar before which he knelt. The auditors remain wrapt, enchanted by his enthusiasm; at length they approach him—they regard him attentively—he is no more! His body remains by the altar, but his soul is in heaven!

Who could have been so selfish as to shed tears over his lot? It was amidst joyful chorusses and acts of thanksgiving that his mortal spoil was deposited beneath the altar, each of the spectators first careful to retain of it some relic, the frequent inspection of which might inspire them with that active charity, that meek piety, capable to obtain for mortals a never-fading crown of glory.

Zambri immediately forwarded to Anna an account of the celestial manner in which her brother quitted this vale of

 tears:

tears: he conjured her not to give way to affliction, but to unite with the several objects of her charity (as he was on the point of doing with some dear friends) in prayers and praises to God, who visits trials upon mortals, only to render them worthy of admission to the seat of endless bliss.

Notwithstanding, Anna wept often, even to her latest hour, her beloved brother: her piety, it is true, was encreased, and she doubled her hospitality and attentions for the indigent travellers who visited Eleana. She survived Ezriel but two years: her death was, like his, sweet and tranquil.

Our lovers having devoted three days to prayer on mount Anoth, returned to their native homes. Abessalom had provided for Elnathan and Sephora a neat and comfortable dwelling, while, for Zabdi and Mara, he had repaired the cottage in which Segor had lived. These abodes he merely intended as patriarchal domains

domains for his sons (now ready to launch upon the noisy theatre of the world), which would sometimes remind them of the religion of their fathers, retrace for them the pure and innocent enjoyments of their youth, and prevent them from forgetting to serve their earliest friends.

It was agreed that Elnathan and Zabdi should precede their wives at Babylon, in order to arrange with greater ease their future establishment. Six months before their departure, Saphat repaired to the capital of the empire, in order to forward, by every means in his power, their future prosperity. He obtained from Nebuchadnezzar the promise, that, after Zabdi should have some time studied the principle of legislation in an inferior civil employment, he should assume in his (Saphat's) place, the office of chief magistrate of the empire, a post he shewed himself already worthy of filling. As the character and studies of Elnathan best fitted him for the military career, it

was agreed that, at all times when he could be absent from the army, he should be admitted to the military councils held in the presence of the great king.

Saphat made known to Abessalom the promised favours which he had obtained for his sons. After Elnathan and Zabdi, whose friendship continued unabated, had returned their expressions of gratitude to Saphat and the king, they resolved upon celebrating their success by a rural feast, by which every inhabitant of the valley would, in some measure, participate in the favours shed over themselves.

They chose for the period of this feast, and gave as the principal motive of it, the marriage of Saaph and Mesron: for Naaman, he had already retired to mount Anoth, and ranged himself under the auspices of Zambri, seeing only in religion what could console him for the melancholy end of his beloved Martha; Zambri had even ordained, that he should succeed

succeed him in his pious ministry, should it prove the will of Heaven for the Scythian to survive him.

Absalom wished that the public amusements, which, had it not been for particular circumstances, were to accompany the marriage of his sons, should be transferred to the present nuptials. Music, vocal and instrumental, ushered in the dawn of that day appointed for their celebration, and at length preceded the car, in which was seated Noëma and the good Osa, on their way to mount Anoth. All the neighbouring villagers, attired in their choicest garments, and decorated with the full-blown flowers of spring, and the yet budding ones of summer, preceded or followed this triumphal car, drawn by six milk-white steeds, and ornamented with wreaths of myrtle and roses. The virgins walked on the right, and were followed by the matrons; on the left were the youths, while their fathers marched behind them; for every

 one,

one, except Noëma and Osa, chose to gain the sacred mount on foot.

Zambri, who, for the first time, exercised his function of high-priest, in performing the marriage-rites, delivered, within the temple, a discourse, painting the many toils and probations by which Elnathan, Zabdi, and Saaph, arrived, with their parents, to the completion of their dearest wishes. His words obtained applauses, and even tears, from the assembly.

This joyous procession returned home happier than they came; and the evening was concluded with feasting, and every species of mirth that could engage the young, and delight the aged to look upon.

The time at length arrived for Elnathan and Zabdi to quit their beloved wives. They were presented by Saphat to the great king, who loaded them with expressions of kindness and esteem: they were reproached by the queen for not

bringing

bringing with them their wives; but Saphat undertook to explain the wise reasons that had prevented it. By Evilmerodac, also, were they graciously received. Thus a brilliant future opened before them.

Zabdi applied himself closely to the study of law and politics, until his opinion was quoted on the most momentous occasions; while Elnathan, with no less success, persevered in his military code.

Although Nebuchadnezzar had suffered the most humiliating of punishments, his love of conquest was not repressed; he yet loved to seize every possible pretext for extending his empire. Babylon was already rich with the spoils of Jerusalem, and several nations of the East; its walls, its gates, its towers, rivalled every other city in magnificence; the temple of Bel towered high, and outshone the ancient tower of Babel. This superb city, surrounded on all sides by the most fertile plains, menaced with destruction every

country of the universe; not a nation but what was jealous of its power, and seized the most trifling occasions to shew their enmity to its ruler.

The king of Persia, though in the evening of his days, to this end invested a province near the source of the Tigris, that had lately been annexed to the Babylonian empire. He secretly assembled a formidable army, and repaired to the left bank of the river, before Nebuchadnezzar had time to march even ten legions towards its right. Elnathan, who was in the bosom of his family (where, with Zabdi, he repaired for three months every year), flew, at the sound of this invasion, to place himself at the head of the second legion of the empire, the command of which he obtained the fifth year after his marriage. The little army of Babylon had met with a sad defeat, in attempting to oppose the landing of the enemy on the right bank of the Tigris; its general-in-chief had even been killed.

It

It was at this juncture, and at the end of the first day's combat, that Elnathan appeared. The command of the army devolving on him, he commanded the armament on the river (which yet endeavoured to oppose the landing of the remainder of the Persians) to feign an escape, and fall down the river to a certain point which he prescribed, and there drawing themselves up in a line, be ready for the offensive at a moment not far distant. On his own part, he retreated, under cover of the night and a thick fog, which favoured his manœuvres, to the distance of a parasang and a half, and concealed his army behind a little chain of hills that stretched in face of the enemy. Here he refreshed the troops, and allowed them a short repose; after which he summoned them to charge their bows, and arrange themselves in close order, and wait in dead silence for the approach of the enemy, who would necessarily pursue their conquest at the approach of

 day.

day. Elnathan was not disappointed the Persians, believing that their adversaries had fled far, at the first dawn scampered forward, without order or defence, to ravage the country. When, from their cries, he believed them quickly ascending the opposite side of the rising grounds, he hurried up the acclivity, and gaining the summit before them, poured down upon them with amazing fury. The enemy, thus surprised, though their numbers were immense, were unable to defend themselves. Elnathan, as his troops gained the plain, extended them in a semicircle towards the east; by which, taking in flank the whole of the enemy, he drove them along the bank of the river, towards the spot where his naval armament was stationed. Most of them, by this time, had fallen under clouds of darts; and the remainder attempting to swim across the Tigris at this point where it became narrower, were intercepted by the boats of the Babylonians, and either sunk or

returned

returned as prisoners to Elnathan. The victory was complete, and the Persian monarch was necessitated to sue immediately for peace. Zabdi was entrusted with the negociation on the part of Nebuchadnezzar, and obliged the Persians not only to defray the expences of the Babylonians on the late occasion, but to cede to them a large tract of Armenia, which bordered the Tigris and Euphrates.

Elnathan, in return for his services, though he had not attained his thirtieth year, was named third in command of all the armies of Nebuchadnezzar; and Zabdi, nearly of the same age, obtained, besides his promise of reversion to the place of Saphat, the part of secretary for foreign affairs.

A magnificent palace, superbly furnished, looking in front upon one of the noblest squares in Babylon, and surrounded at the rear by luxuriant gardens, was appropriated to the brothers, as a sojourn, where they might fix their wives, and bring up their families; for

Sephora

Sephora and Mara now gave hopes that this tender care would soon belong to them.

Elnathan and Zabdi, unwilling to observe the jealous impressions which this accumulation of favours might make upon the rest of the courtiers, and besides, anxious, at this moment, to visit their wives and parents, requested a month's leave of absence; which they obtained.

Abessalom and Noëma gloried, above all, in their prosperity; but, ever willing to attribute every new blessing to Providence, they begged leave to repair, with their sons, Sephora, and Mara, to the beloved sanctuary of Zambri, over the grave of Ezriel to offer thanksgiving to Heaven. This amiable couple were now bowed down by years, and they considered this little pilgrimage as a worthy preparation for their last hour, which certain forebodings warned them was not far distant. Their children being now independent of them in every respect, and having fulfilled their most sanguine

6 wishes,

wishes, they felt as if they had nothing farther to live for. Sephora and Mara, though advanced to half the term of their pregnancy, performed, with Elnathan and Zabdi, their journey on foot; while Abesalom and Noëma proceeded, closely attended by them, in a car of Elnathan's.

The hearts of the aged parents glowed with satisfaction as they again reached home, and recollected the tender benediction of Zambri: their forebodings no doubt had been sent from Heaven; for, shortly after the performance of their pilgrimage, they sickened, and within a few hours of each other, breathed their last, blessing God and their children, who hung round them, in admiration and affliction unspeakable.

It was generally agreed that their ashes should repose on mount Anoth; hither then were they conveyed by their children, who watered every step of the earth with their tears; their sighs were echoed by every inhabitant of the canton; the aged bending to the earth, the infant scarcely

scarcely above the cradle—all expressed their sorrow for the loss of this virtuous couple. The grief of Moria knew no bounds.

Elnathan and Zabdi having now in sorrow reached their thirtieth birth-day, with Sephora and Mara in their eight-and-twentieth year, could no longer endure to remain in the neighbourhood so long beloved by them; they therefore hastened their departure for Babylon.—They left Chœreas and Susanna, Saaph and Mesron, in possession of the domains of their adored parents. Zambri was unable long to support his affliction for the loss of friends so dear: having transferred, by prayers and his holy touch, his sacred dignity on Naaman, he followed Abessalom and Noëma in less than three months; first forwarding to his son and Elnathan those tender benedictions which Heaven permits to parents to dispose, as presages for their virtuous children of a blessed immortality.

ELNATHAN;

OR,

THE AGES OF MAN.

BOOK VI.

THE TANJORE MAHARAJA SERFOGI'S SARASWATI MAHAL.

BOOK VI.

The Prime of Life.

THE age of thirty, now attained by Elnathan and Zabdi, was considered, amongst civilized nations, as the period when men were capable of governing themselves. Our Chaldeans had no doubt received an education that placed them far above the greatest part of their countrymen; they had rendered themselves illustrious by their exploits, and had gained honourable posts, at a period when other men were barely known: yet these rapid advances were attended by danger; they might encourage their attainers to abandon themselves to ambi-

tion,

tion, and expose them to the perfidy of courtiers, who, actuated by vanity, at first promote early genius, but soon become envious, and are ready to bar the avenues of preferment; thence, too, might our youthful statesmen forfeit their ingenuousness, and descend into the depths of intrigue.

Elnathan and Zabdi reflected too deeply, and calculated too wisely on the hazards they ran, not to lament, in an interested point of view, the sage counsels of their parents, who were capable, as ready, to dictate in all emergencies; scarcely indeed did a day pass during their tempestuous career, in the course of which they were not led to shed a tear to the memory of those dear parents, who surpassed all others in their wise and affectionate guidance of their children. But however they might incline towards the humbler walks of life, an imperious duty called upon Elnathan and Zabdi to lend all their endeavours to retard the

decline

decline of their country, which was visibly approaching. Two great resources yet remained to them, in moments when distracted by the anxiety of their hearts, or the uncertainty of their reason; these precious resources, still ready to escape, were the tenderness of Moria, and the wisdom and experience of Saphat.

The present situation of Sephora and Mara, added to their being in deep mourning, authorised their remaining in retirement during the first year of their stay at Babylon; nor were they expected to appear at court: but their good sense and quickness of observation enabled them during this period, when they indulged in intimate society, to acquire those forms, and that ease of manner, which should fit them to appear in the great world.

During their partial retirement, Sephora gave birth to a son, who was named Sophonius; and in a month after, Mara became the mother of Zara, the only

only fruit of her union with Zabdi. As may be supposed, these infants were nurtured on the bosom of their mothers.

These amiable couples possessed a great advantage by the presence of the prophet Daniel, who sojourned at Babylon from the time the Hebrews had been there led to captivity. They were able to consult this minister of the Almighty in all religious concerns, and, under his auspices, continue the true worship in the midst of idolatry; nor did this meet with opposition from Nebuchadnezzar, who, though he never abjured idolatry, had been forced to acknowledge the omnipotence of the God of the Israelites.

Our Chaldeans, so favoured by their king, too soon perceived how much they had to dread from the malice and envy of their fellow-courtiers. Although they had been received by them, on their return from their native home, with every demonstration of joy and hearty welcome, these false hearts watched, in silence

lence and secrecy, for occasions to attach blame to the new favourites. It is difficult, nay, almost impossible, for a man, the most wary, who is placed in an eminent situation, not to lay himself open to censure; first, because all mortals are liable to err; next, because envy is ever awake to his detriment; and failure of success may be easily attributed to defective measures. In the first military council where Elnathan presided in the presence of the king, he feared not to condemn the luxury displayed in camps by most officers, as exciting the murmurs and jealousy of the soldiers, and tending to enervate those who should set an example of temperance and moderation, and who should fortify themselves against danger and difficulties. Unfortunately Nebuchadnezzar delighted in pomp and shew; according to the former example of Persia, he marched to battle attended by his wives and eunuchs, even by players and buffoons, and was served out of vessels

vessels of gold and silver. Still Elnathan represented that, by such examples, the Medes and Persians, notwithstanding their distinguished talents for war, lost the honour of preserving Chaldea as tributary. Zabdi, also present at this council of state, concurred in the truth of these opinions; and, in his civil capacity, added, that the empire became daily weakened by conquest, and its allies rendered vile, from the immense subsidies drawn from them.

The king frowned, and was silent; while the remainder of the councillors magnified the resources of the kingdom and those of his tributaries, who gloried, they said, in being, on any terms, subject to such a conqueror. They attempted to shew, that the magnificence displayed by Nebuchadnezzar and his officers, had the happiest effect in gaining the respect and submission of adversaries, indigent and unpolished. In private, the same men failed not to ridicule the niggardli-

ness

ness of the *rustic* statesmen, and the narrow notions belonging to pastoral education: happily, however, Daniel endeavoured to convince the monarch of the purity of his favourites' views, and the ardent zeal with which they were actuated for their country's welfare.

Things were nearly in this state, when Sephora and Mara, having weaned their infants, were presented at court. Sephora regularly beautiful, and Mara even more than pretty, brought not with them those modish airs and borrowed graces usually sought for within this artificial circle; still did their simplicity and native dignity claim the admiration of the courtiers; always placed next each other, their charms were reciprocally reflected. The ladies of the ring whispered amongst each other of the pretensions of those new comers, who played the part of goddesses on the first theatre of the world, while they were only born for pastoral scenes; at the same time, they compli-

 mented

mented Elnathan and Zabdi on the beauty of their Venuses, the dignity of their Semiramises, and the inexpressible charms of their two Graces, to match whom, it would be almost impossible to find a third.—Notwithstanding their usual clear-sightedness, our heroes, enchanted with the praises of their wives, were dupes to these flatteries.

Unfortunately, what was most true in the homage offered to Sephora, was to be found in the heart of the prince Evilmerodac: he ceased not to extol her superiority; and, during the course of a year that his passion increased, general attention was excited, to observe how it would terminate, this prince hitherto having been assailed only by trifling fancies. But a virtuous woman, in such circumstances, betrays an air of modesty, which serves her as an ægis against the assaults of vice.

Evilmerodac gave a succession of *fêtes*, the *avowed* object of which was to cele-

brate

brate the victories of the great king abroad, victories generally obtained by the valour of Elnathan: he thought that, in the absence of her husband, he might tempt Sephora to share his passion by brilliant displays; he even determined to allure her by splendid offers; and, for this purpose, sent to entreat she would grant him a few moments' conference. It was difficult and unsafe to deny his request; she returned therefore for answer, that she would be happy to see the prince about the third hour after noon; she also advertised Zabdi to conceal himself, at that hour, within a closet adjoining her apartment.

Evilmerodac failed not to appear at the appointed time, and was received by Sephora, who was attired with more than usual simplicity. As the prince gazed on her from head to foot, she said, in a light tone, that she conceived she could not better honour his reception, than by assuming nearly the same attire as when

 she

she pronounced at the altar that vow on which the whole happiness of her life depended.

This salute was nothing less than what Evilmerodac least desired: determining, however, not to be repulsed, he soon after replied, that the happiness and glory of her days was precisely the subject on which he wished to discourse with her— "Heaven, no doubt," said he, "intended you should grace the highest rank in life; nor permitted you to embrace a secondary union, but as a step to exaltation. Long have I desired to find a woman worthy of being wife to the heir-apparent of the first monarchy in the universe; but my searches hitherto have proved vain. You are aware that, according to the established laws of this empire, when its monarch chances to make choice of a subject to share his throne, every tie she may have contracted is immediately broken, and it becomes even her duty to contribute entirely to the

the happiness of her sovereign: you have inspired me, by your virtues, beauty, and talents, with a predilection in your favour, beyond what every woman of rank and beauty in Chaldea has been capable of: I do not hesitate, then, to offer you my hand; nor can I suppose the homage will prove unacceptable."

"Prince," replied Sephora, in a mild but decided tone, "nothing could tempt me to violate the established laws of the kingdom, but when they are in contradiction with those of my God. Educated in that faith transmitted to us from Heaven through Moses, I regard persons united by the ties of marriage freely contracted, as making but one being, impossible to be separated, but by death."

"And art thou indeed blind enough to consider thyself indissolubly united with a man who so plainly prefers glory to thee? who fears not hourly the stroke that may separate him from thee for ever?"

 "Forbear!

was ever glad to be allowed the oppor-tunity, at this momentous crisis, of clasp-ing her to his heart. He must, however, head his troops. Sephora was placed in a place of safety, in the rear of the army, there, with inexpressible anxiety, to wait the event of the battle, which the next moment commenced. It was bloody; the Parthians fought with savage bra-very; they were unable, however, finally to cope with the disciplined troops of Babylon and its experienced generals; they surrendered, with the loss of many killed and made prisoners, and Elnathan was covered with laurels.

The first news of success was brought to Sephora by one of the enemy's leaders, an aged Scythian, who escaped the car-nage he knew not whither; and at length, overcome by years and fatigue, dropped at the feet of Sephora, even as she was looking out, in agonizing suspense, for either life or death; for the fate of El-nathan, it might be said, was to bring her

one

one or other. Having comprehended the signs of the old man, who spoke not her language, in gratitude for the intelligence he had brought, she bound up his wounds, and administering to him a cordial, promised to intercede with her husband for protection for him; and faithfully did she keep her word.

The prophet Daniel lost not a moment after the return of Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon (which immediately succeeded the subjection of the Parthians), to use his endeavours to free Sephora from the farther persecution of Evilmerodac; he forbore accusing him before the king, but artfully engaged the latter to issue an edict, prohibiting divorce, except in cases of adultery, amongst the Hebrews; not even one of the royal blood were hereafter to be permitted lawfully to separate man and wife, the parents of whom professed the law of Moses. Daniel urged this measure as some amelioration to the condition of the

the unfortunate Israelites, also to secure the peace of Elnathan and Zabdi, the faithful and useful subjects of the king; a more favourable moment indeed could not have been seized to demand a favour, in the name of the husband of Sephora.

That prudent and amiable woman, still desirous that absence might weaken the passion of Evilmerodac, resigned the pleasure of returning to Babylon, after the defeat of the Parthians, to witness her husband's triumph, and took the resolution of retiring for some time to her native home. In addition to her two faithful attendants, who had conducted her in safety to the army, she was permitted by Elnathan to lead with her the venerable man who had so lately relieved her anxiety, and to administer to his wants, until the fate of the prisoners should be decided by the king.

Elnathan returned alone to Babylon, excusing the absence of his wife on account of her advanced pregnancy, which rendered

rendered her little solicitous to appear in public. He met from Nebuchadnezzar the most flattering reception, but, though endowed with reflection and experience, he was not yet arrived at that term when he could with ease master his resentments; his salutation, therefore, to Evilmerodac (whose designs Sephora had at length confided to him, gaining at the same time his promise that he would not betray his knowledge of them), was cold, though respectful; it was such as to render visible his distrust to any one conscious of deserving it. The prince felt his shame; and Sephora being no longer present to him, as also being restrained by the edict of his father, he shortly transferred his affections from her to another object.

Mara, disappointed at not seeing her dear Sephora return with Elnathan, and besides, anxious to visit her mother, set out for her native valley, taking with her her daughter and the sons of her friend; she carried with her also the decree of

 Nebuchadnezzar,

Nebuchadnezzar, that all the enemy's leaders taken prisoners in the late campaign should be put to death, lest, at any future period, they might turn their arms against him. Not all the influence of Elnathan and Zabdi could procure a remittance of this cruel sentence; they were therefore obliged to desire that Sephora would send to Babylon, under a safe escort, the aged and almost disabled Scythian she had led with her. Alas! what dreadful sounds were those!

Though rude and uncultivated, the aspect of this warrior, his grey hairs, his wounds, his casting himself on her protection, and perhaps the circumstance of his being the first to announce to her the success of Elnathan, all interested Sephora in his favour, and made her rejoice in being allowed to soften his captivity.

Sephora, on the evening of her arrival at the dwelling of her beloved parents, retired to hold uninterrupted converse with them,

them, while her aged captive was allowed to repose within a bower of the garden. He lay smarting under fatigue, and the irritation of a severe wound received in the leg, when a young man, by the request of Sephora, appeared, to inquire after his wants. He understood not the Chaldean, and mechanically answered in those rude accents imbibed beneath the mountains of Caucasus. Saaph, who stood before him, was no longer at a loss—he replied to him in the same. The old man started—What surprise! what joy! to find himself understood!—He was not then wholly amongst strangers! he might hope for mercy, since a countryman was near!—"And who art thou," said he, his eyes brightening with their native fierceness, "that thus speakest?"

"I was born," replied Saaph, "of Bozec, a celebrated chief of one of the Scythian colonies, settled at the foot of mount Taurus; my mother is the virtuous Osa, my eldest brother the sage and

holy Naaman. According to the dread-ful laws of our country, our father stifled the tender voice of Nature within him, and consented that we should be offer-ed as victims to his God; he even pos-sessed heroism sufficient to resign him-self to sleep, after acquiescing in this sentence. While he yet slept, his wife Osa secretly withdrew us from his power, and guided us along the Euphrates, to-wards this happy country which we now inhabit."

"And does thy mother yet live?" replied the warrior, in a tone of agi-tation.

"She lives," said Saaph, "and even resides close by. But her sight is gone; and my cares, with those of Mesron my wife, are her only guides and support."

"And thy brother, where is he?"

"He is become a minister of the true God, and resides within the temple of mount Anoth, distant four parasangs and a half from hence."

"Young

"Young man, conduct me, I prithee, to thy mother."

Saaph hesitated; the uncouth appearance of the stranger, and the wildness that glared in his looks, made him almost fear that some alarm was preparing for his mother.

The old man perceived his reluctance—"Lead me, I say, to thy mother—she has nothing to fear from me; though she was no doubt culpable in snatching away the victims destined to Moloch."

"What wouldst thou say to her?"

"Nought that can harm her. Thinkst thou I could, in any way, ill requite the hospitality I find offered in these plains?"

Saaph, though but half assured, led the captive to the dwelling of his mother. Osa was listening attentively to Mesron, who read to her that beautiful passage of the Song of Solomon, where the tender wife invites her beloved to sit beside her. Saaph motioned to the warrior to offer no interruption. At length Mesron closing

sing the book, the old man pronounced aloud the name of Osa. The venerable matron appeared struck by the sound.

"Osa," repeated the Scythian, in a still louder voice, "thy husband Bezec stands before thee. Soon perhaps will death make me his prey; yet shall I die happy, for having once more beheld thee and my children, whom I always loved, but loved not so well as our God, who demanded them as a sacrifice, only, however, to render them happier. Osa, dost thou not know me?"

As the poor mariner, long threatened by destruction from the tempest, cheers up as the skies brighten, and again trembles for the thunder's last clap, deriding his fears, however, when it is past; so Osa, after long vicissitude, tasting calm, is assailed by terror at those sounds of Bezec. But soon joy succeeds in her heart; for she remembers that his voice was once the zephyr by whose breath two lovely flowers budded from her bosom—

son.—"Yes," said she, after a moment's agitation, "I do indeed know thee;" and rising from her seat, with the assistance of Mesron, she approaches her husband. "Thou shalt not die before me," added she, throwing herself into his arms; "the just God, who saved me and my sons, will save thee also. Bezec, thou wert born to be just; but thou couldst not, by thyself, become acquainted with the eternal laws of justice. Relinquish, I beseech thee, barbarous prejudices, and let the true light penetrate thy soul. Saaph will lead thee to Naaman, our first-born; he is a priest of God, and will convince thee of those ordinances, worthy alone of an immortal soul."

Bezec strained his wife to his bosom—"I am satisfied," said he. Saaph clasped the knees of his father, who embraced him; Mesron also bowed before the old man, and partook of his paternal solicitude.

Sephora and her parents were soon made

made partakers in this scene. What joy did the former feel, at having been the means of promoting so happy a reunion! The virtuous Osa might now descend to the tomb, every wish of her heart gratified. The aged warrior, too, had found sufficient recompence for his captivity.

The next day, he was mounted on a mule, and conducted by Saaph towards mount Anoth. It was noon when they set out: a refreshing breeze wafted from the east, allured the travellers along paths, on each side of which the yellow harvest invited the hand of the reaper; the vineyards, too, bent beneath the weight of their genial offerings. A few hours before the close of one of the longest days of summer, the travellers reached the end of their little journey.

Naaman, from its earliest dawn, and while engaged in fervent prayer, had received the revelation that, before its close, he should behold the author of his days, and that he should even become the

the instrument of his conversion, to the only mode of worship acceptable to Heaven. He remained given up to this blessed expectation, when he heard footsteps approach the temple: they were the footsteps of Bezec.

Naaman advanced to meet him—"Oh, my father!" said he, in the Scythian tongue, "how thankful I am to the Almighty for thus granting me the opportunity of embracing thy knees!"

"And how knowest thou," said the astonished Bezec, "that I am indeed thy father? Who told thee so?"

"Him," replied the priest, "from whom no secrets are hid, who, by his nod, directs the events of earth and heaven, whose saving grace restores to virtue him whom ignorance alone hath led astray, but who allows to perish in endless darkness, the wilful sinners. Thou canst not, oh my father! refuse to know Him after this miracle, which teaches me to recognize thee in distant climes, after a separation

ration of three-and-twenty years, when time and other accidents must have totally obliterated from our respective memories, the traces of our features in that period."

"This is indeed above my comprehension," said Bezec, embracing his son—"*thy* God must indeed be wise and powerful!—But yet methinks there is a contradiction in his laws. Surely he revealed to his favoured people (and other nations have learned the decree from them), that the blood of the first-born of woman was a necessary propitiation for the sins of other men: then, how comes it that the deceit of Osa escaped unpunished, and that thou Naaman, the required offering, should even live to be the repository of the secrets of the Most High?"

"My father, thou forgettest that it was not to God, the Creator and Preserver, that thou intended me as a sacrifice, but to Moloch, that idol imagined by the wicked. Neither is the law of God rightly understood;

understood; for be it known, that the sacrifice of the first-born was remitted, and man instead was allowed to propi-tiate Heaven by the blood of animals unendued with reason, until the coming of the Son of God, when his blood shall atone for all, for all who practise virtue and repentance."

Naaman unclosed the scriptures, and spent the remainder of the evening in proving to his father, that he had hither-to been devoted to a barbarous su[illegible] tion. The eyes of the Scythian [illegible] opened, and he voluntarily spent [illegible] whole of the night within the [illegible] praying forgiveness for the [illegible] grace for the future.

At an early hour next morning, his sons sought him; and with hearts satis-fied, and countenances beaming with joy, led him back to their mother, who gloried in the conversion of her husband. The wounds of Bezec began to heal, and this happy family enjoyed present feli-

city,

city, nor dared to dream of a cruel separation, when Mara brought with her the barbarous decree of Nebuchadnezzar, and plunged them into misery beyond description.

Moria and Sephora immediately wrote to Saphat and Daniel the interesting circumstances belonging to the prisoner, and beseeched them to intercede with the king for his life: but Osa could not be prevented from also setting out with ... husband and sons, in the hope of ...ing the monarch with her tears.

...phat, assisted by Cyprus, soon after ...ival, procured them an audience ...ng. The order in which they ...presented could hardly fail to melt the most obdurate:—Osa, deprived of sight, leaned on her husband, whom years and dangers had nearly disabled; they were preceded by Naaman in his pontifical robes, crowned with the sacred mitre, on the front of which was engraved the name of God. Bezec was

supported,

supported, on his left hand, by Daniel; Osa, on her right, by Saaph. Seraiah and Misraim, priests of the Jews, closed the procession, at once reverend and affecting.

Nebuchadnezzar had already been instructed by Daniel of the virtues and peculiar situation of the Scythians; his mind had been even softened in their favour; but when they appeared so supported, and so imploring, he found it impossible not, for once, to lean to mercy's side.

The old man knelt before him, while Naaman and Saaph, with the weeping Osa, implored the life of their father and husband.

Nebuchadnezzar, still farther awed by the presence of Daniel, raised up Bezec, and desired him to live; he even extended his generosity so far as to bestow on him liberty to return to his country: but Bezec preferred settling in Chaldea. He returned with Osa to the dwelling that had so long afforded her peaceful shelter;

shelter; here they spun out the remainder of their life, removed from want and care, and successively breathed their last in the arms of their sons, on whom, with Mesron and the young Aspar (the only fruit of her union with Saaph), they bestowed, in the name of the true God, their tenderest benediction.

Nebuchadnezzar, after the pardon of Bezec, still turned his thoughts on new conquests: his schemes were confided to Elnathan, whose thirst for glory allowed him not to oppose the tyrannic views of his prince with that decision which his duty should have dictated. Dangerous are the extremes to which an early taste for arms leads to: who that observed Elnathan in his youth, who that witnessed his traits of generosity and kindness of heart, could have then supposed that he would second the designs of Nebuchadnezzar (formerly conqueror of the Egyptians and the nations of the East) to overrun the western hemisphere?

He

He forgot not, however, his obligations to Egypt and Greece; in conjunction with Zabdi, he induced Nebuchadnezzar to think not of their invasion, but to conclude with them new treaties of close alliance.

Sephora and Mara were now returned to Babylon, and the former gave birth to a daughter, named Theena.—Elnathan, while new warfare was in agitation, frequently indulged in the pleasures of the chace, to which he had been always used, in time of peace, to abandon himself with even reprehensible ardour. Having one day exhausted his quiver in pursuit of some deer, which his keen-scented hounds had driven through thick forests, over steep rocks, and across rapid streams, he yet found an arrow, which he was determined to exhaust ere his return home. It was almost dark, and he directed it through a copse, towards an object that lay couched, and which he believed to be a fawn—but, alas! no. Elnathan ap-

 proached,

proached, and, to his inexpressible sorrow, found he had pierced the arm of a young woodcutter, who, from fatigue, had fallen asleep beside his bundle of sticks. He endeavoured to sooth the cries of the youth, and, with a tender hand, to withdraw the arrow. With difficulty he succeeded; and tearing asunder some of his garments, he bound up the wound: then taking the patient on his shoulders, carried him within his palace, where every tender care was used for his recovery. It was at length effected; but Elnathan had received a lesson that made him ever after avoid the chace.

This event was followed by one of a nature not less useful for Zabdi, who, from his first entrance into Babylon, had been addicted to gaming, but who, of late, had given himself up to it in an alarming degree. During one of his nocturnal sittings, fortune was favourable to him in an unexampled degree. But of those who lost, the most to be pitied was

a citizen

a citizen of Babylon, who at length played singly against Zabdi: he was father of a large family, and his fortune becoming suddenly and unavoidably deranged, he had been willing to trust the chances of the dice to retrieve his losses; but, alas! he continued only to lose, until even his personal effects became mortgaged to Zabdi. He preserved, however, an unruffled countenance to the last; when, having no more to stake, he retired. Zabdi rightly judged that the tranquillity of his ruined adversary could be but apparent, and even trembled lest it might be the effect of some desperate resolution: amidst the darkness of night he followed his steps, until he perceived him indeed ascend an eminence that overhung the Euphrates, and apparently prepare to cast himself in. At this moment our Chaldean darted forward, and catching hold of the unfortunate victim's robe, snatched him from destruction—" My

 friend,"

friend," said he to him, "my conscience has reproached me in a lucky moment—I have not won, but stolen your money; for it is certain your senses, usually so clear, must have been clouded during the last few hours. Pardon my fault, for the pleasure I feel in restoring you to life, and giving back to you your gold and jewels; I also release you from all your extravagant engagements; and to-morrow will publish, without entering into particulars, that you at last obtained a fortunate revenge of me. Moreover, it shall be my care to obtain for you, through the influence of the good Saphat, the office of magistracy which I know you have been seeking. Come to me in two days; and, in the mean time, promise not to reveal my crime, as I do to keep a secret your folly."

Zebdi then took the hand of the gamester, whom admiration and gratitude had rendered speechless, and led him to his

home,

home, charging his servants to take care of their master, who had but just recovered from a long swoon.

Two days after, the generous Zabdi put into the hands of his friend the appointment to the office above mentioned; at the same time they received a reciprocal promise from each other, never more to play for aught that could injure others, or endanger their own virtue.

The good office rendered by Saphat, at the request of Zabdi, to the reformed gamester, was the last distinguished mark of benevolence exercised by him in a public capacity: immediately after, he obtained permission of the great king to resign his employments, and henceforth spend his time either at Ithamar, or in solitude with Eubulus: thus, by friendship and meditation, to tranquillize his soul, and render it fitter for heaven. As is natural to advanced age, he flattered himself he had yet many years to taste of tranquil enjoyment; but it proved to

 him

him only the dawn of purer felicity: three months after his departure from Babylon, he found his strength give way, and that he had but a few days to live. He had married his nephew to a rich heiress of Babylon, who had renounced idolatry; of this union there remained only the interesting Saba, who, at the period we speak of, had lost her parents, and had no kindred but on the side of Saphat. Ere he expired, this venerable personage expressed his wish that his great-grand-daughter Zara might become the wife of Sophonius, the eldest son of Elnathan, and that Saba might be united to Azer, the second son of the warrior. He left Moria sole possessor of his wealth, all but his palace of Ithamar, which he decreed should be common property, between her, Mara, Sephora, Elnathan, and Zabdi, to descend successively to each as they should survive the others. In his last moments, he was attended by all those persons, and many others of his

friends:

friends; he conversed with them tranquilly, and even cheerfully. To Mara he entrusted the education of Saba. His blessing was distributed around; and without a groan did he at length expire, in the arms of his beloved Moria.

Eubulus, according to his request, had prepared for him a tomb beside that of Gersom and Jamin, and here did the good man repose the ashes of his friend, unaccompanied by funeral pomp, as had been the request of Saphat.

Moria was reconducted to her peaceful home, by Mara, Sephora, and their husbands. When they had recommended her in particular to the care of Saaph and Mesron (Moria refusing to reside either at Ithamar or Babylon), and beseeched of her to warn them of any danger that might menace her life, they returned to the court of the great king, from which Elnathan and Zabdi were not permitted to remain long absent.

Every thing was now prepared for the

 departure

departure of Nebuchadnezzar, who, under vain pretexts, was going to attempt new conquests. His first assaults were intended against various tribes of the Celtæ, who had assisted the Parthians in the last campaign. Elnathan was now next to him in command, over an army of two hundred thousand men. The king recommended to Zabdi (who, with his brother, had reached his eighth lustre) to occupy himself, during his absence, in reforming the civil administration of the kingdom. Sephora followed her husband to battle; the more willingly, as Cyprus followed the steps of Nebuchadnezzar.

Elnathan had studied the character of his northern adversaries; he knew them inaccessible to the seasons' change, patient in suffering, and submissive to their chiefs; seeking death rather than flight, but remaining powerless and stupified when suddenly attacked by a well-disciplined army: he believed them also unable

able long to support the attacks of hunger, requiring substantial nourishment, and madly addicted to the use of spirituous liquors.

Nebuchadnezzar, enlightened by the counsels of his general, after a rapid march through Parthia and Scythia, allowed not time for the Sarmatians and Allemanni to collect themselves, but instantly attacked them. Numbers of their troops fell in battle, while the remainder he reduced to a state of famine, that subdued their strength and courage; he became, in short, at the end of a single campaign, master of this part of the world, and rendered it tributary to him.

The Gauls, who had endeavoured, but too late, to assist their neighbours, now became the object of the conqueror's vengeance. Had the natural bravery and quickness of these people been tempered by somewhat of the patience and phlegm of those newly conquered, they might have placed an invincible barrier to the

 farther

further inroads of the great king; but, fiery in their natures, incapable of solid reflection or continuity in their plans, besides, easily disheartened, they became at length subject to the conqueror, who followed the advice of Elnathan, in changing his mode of warfare, and adapting it to the character of the nation.

But the ambition of Nebuchadnezzar was not yet satisfied; he would push his conquests even to the southern point of Europe, where Hercules placed his pillars, believing that the earth there finished. The different tribes of Iberia, or Spain, in haste united to oppose his progress; but their efforts in the end proved vain, and they were obliged also to deliver up their hostages, and acknowledge themselves tributary to Babylon. Thus Nebuchadnezzar, having passed the celebrated pillars by some yards, erected, on the edge of the Great Sea, or Mediterranean, a superb monument, surmounted with four pyramids, and bearing on its

quadrangular

quadrangular base pompous inscriptions, attesting that his power had outstretched all known bounds. After an absence of three years, he returned to Babylon, where he shared with Elnathan his splendid triumphs.

It must be acknowledged, that the last in secret frequently reproached himself for tacitly approving, and at length seconding the ambitious views of his prince: besides the cruelty and injustice they involved, Elnathan was forced to reflect, that an immense edifice of vain glory, suddenly erected, such as the Chaldean empire, must soon crumble to its base, deprived of all compact and solid foundation. But he was in the prime of life, willing to assure to his family prosperity, anxious to become a hero in the eyes of his countrymen, and to be looked on as a demi-god by Sephora. But for riper years was it reserved to rein his passions, and unfold to him a more perfect plan of wisdom.

Zebdi also aimed at glory, by means surely more virtuous, but, in their effects, perhaps not less dangerous. His genius, and every good quality of his heart, was engaged in weaving a plan of political reform, fair to meditate on, but by far too mild and perfect to keep in subordination a people sunk in luxury and vice. To promote religious toleration was his first and grand wish: secondly, he would change the nature of the taxes, as also the mode of collecting them; and, as a principle of justice, levy them on each citizen in proportion to his fortune, without regard to dignity or birth. He considered the mass of the nation as having a right to judge the operations of government—a privilege which, though in a moderate degree, might be allowed the great and powerful, should be strictly forbidden to the lower class, for whom political ignorance is safety. He would restrain luxury, and introduce sumptuary laws: he distinguished not, however, suf-

 ficiently

ficiently between the luxury of individuals, which is destructive, and that of the government, which is duly necessary to its maintenance; he should have aimed at the former, without hitting the latter. To abolish slavery was indeed a plan worthy of his generous heart; his attention was directed to leave no trace of it amongst mortals. To soften punishments, and create an equal distribution of justice; suffering judges to be chosen without reference to hereditary qualifications, were amongst his ordinances. By his system, every man was entitled to promulgate his opinions without reserve.

But Zabdi had not yet reflected on the arguments that might be opposed to so liberal a system of legislation; experience had not taught him, that there are races of men so vile, that slavery, instead of degrading, exalts their natures, by rendering them tame and industrious; that, by presenting to the criminal too many sources of favour, he becomes incorrigible;

gible; and that judges, except chosen from the privileged classes, are liable to excessive partiality, to err, from ignorance or negligence, not having a sufficient stake to guard. Had Zabdi been deeper read in human nature, and, above all, in the character of his countrymen (which was light and unstable, inclined, if not ruled with severity, to insolence and cruelty), he would have perceived that, to allow every man to discuss freely all topics, was licensing insubordination, and giving room to demagogues, by their inflated eloquence, to excite murmurs and sedition.

The favourite code of Zabdi was rejected by Nebuchadnezzar; but unfortunately recalled, and in part adopted by his successors.

In the midst of their legislative and warlike toils, the care of their families was never neglected by Zabdi or Elnathan; their love for their wives met no interruption, it was their haven and con-

solation

solation in every difficulty, and ever afforded a delightful relaxation from severer studies. In concert with Sephora and Mara, they tended the education of their children; and in this followed, as nearly as the variation of circumstances would permit, the wise and amiable plans of Abessalom and Noëma, as exercised towards themselves. Tenderer mothers than Sephora and Mara were scarcely to be met—they would have recoiled at the idea of their infants drawing nourishment from any bosom but their own; and though placed in a sphere that claimed much of their attention for society, no means were neglected that could forward, in the minds of their children, the growth of piety, of patience, of knowledge, tending either to render them useful or lovely.

Elnathan, assisted by the prophet Daniel, obtained from the king permission to have removed to Babylon the excellent college of Saron, that there might

yet

yet be found in that city an asylum for the nurture of good morals and true science. The two sons of Sephora, according to the plan followed with their father, were there placed in their tenth year; Elnathan and Zabdi conducted there also, at the same age, the young Aspar, son of Saaph and Meseron. Mara, more sedentary than Sephora, had the principal share in the education of Theena, as well as of Zara and Saba: the same plan was pursued with these as had been followed by Susanna and Moria, when, aided by their enlightened friends, they sought to render their daughters an ornament and benefit to society.

This young sect, as it might be called, in the midst of a large and dissolute city, practising, under the parental auspices, the law of Moses in all its purity, were early accustomed to assist and love each other. It might from a tender period be presaged, that, after the artful management of their parents, sympathy would

would one day lead to a union between Sophonius and Zara; that Azer would love Saba; and that Aspar might become the husband of Theena: it was also to be foreseen, that these couples would fulfil the tenderest wishes of their parents and protectors, in producing happiness for their fellow-creatures, and for each other.

Sephora, while following her husband over the western continent, had born to him a son, whom, in his third year, she had the inexpressible anguish of losing. This infant had been particularly endeared to her, from his first drawing breath amidst difficulties and dangers, even as her beloved Elnathan was gathering his brightest laurels. How fast did her tears then fall, as his infant spirit resisted every fond attention to be detained on earth! His loss made Sephora truly sensible of the evils of life. He had been always of a delicate constitution, which, with his bearing the mark of an arrow on his

his forehead, was to be accounted for by the following accident, one which had nearly cut short the brilliant career of Elnathan.

In the country of Helvetia invaded by Nebuchadnezzar, was to be found the most undaunted spirit of liberty; its inhabitants first beheld with raillery, and next with that contempt their courage inspired, the Asiatic quit his fertile plains, reputed the paradise of the globe, to snatch from them the enjoyment of Nature's rudest productions, as also a state of tranquillity, their only treasure: a profound veneration for the Supreme Being, a love, unmixed with weakness, for their wives and children, a readiness to assist each other, either when their huts were engulfed by the tumbling avalanche, or when invaded by a neighbouring foe, also distinguished the natives of this mountainous region. Upon the advance of the conqueror, they climbed, in various troops, their most difficult defiles,

and

and showered upon the heads of their invaders immense masses of rocks. Having thus destroyed numbers, they quickly precipitated themselves upon others of the enemy who fled, and levelled them with their immense clubs and long and well-sharpened pikes.

Elnathan saw no other means of resisting these barbarians, than by keeping possession of the plains, and preventing them, by well-stationed garrisons, from descending from the mountains at the approach of winter, as was their custom, to seek subsistence for themselves and their flocks. The design was successful; for winter came, and perishing with hunger, they found it impossible to seek relief otherwise than by submission. At first they attempted to descend, and by force take possession of their winter habitations; but the trial was vain. Amongst the first whom famine and the tempest forced to hazard a descent, was an old man already past his sixteenth lustre, whose

whose wealth consisted in a cow, three goats, and six sheep. A daughter, past her sixth lustre, was his only consolation: assisted by her arm, and sometimes carried on her shoulders, he had reached the foot of an immense height almost perpendicular, which, with the same assistance, he had gained in the middle of summer, preceded by his little flock, which it was his design to let seek the herbs that then flourished above. He had placed his first step on the plain, and was within a few paces of his rustic shed, when two Chaldeans imperiously commanded him to advance no further, and took from him his bow and a rude scymitar that was confined within his girdle.

The old man, unaccustomed to be commanded, as also ignorant of the nature of the orders he received, still advanced; upon which the enemy let fly at him an arrow, that, as it grazed the top of his head, inflicted a bloody wound. He fell into the arms of his daughter; while the soldiers,

soldiers, believing that their victim was rendered incapable of further offence, turned away. Elnathan, however, was not far distant, and feeling compunction for the unjust warfare that thus assailed the life of harmless age, approached, to assist the old man's daughter in succouring him: but she, fearing that he had only the barbarous intent of completing the sacrifice of her parent, let fly at him an arrow, which lodged deep in his left arm.

"Oh ungrateful woman!" cried Elnathan, "it is thus you reward me, who only wished to befriend you!"

By his tone and gesture, the young woman comprehended her mistake—she appeared much afflicted by it. She approached him, her father leaning on her right arm; her left was now offered to Elnathan, which he accepted; and thus engaged, she reached the hut that was used to shield her and her parent from the pitiless storms of winter.

She

She now applied a styptic to her father's wound, and next carefully sought to withdraw the arrow from that of Elnathan: with difficulty she succeeded, causing to him a great loss of blood. She now bandaged his arm, and spread some mats for him to repose on, it being impossible for him immediately to remove.

It was in this state that he was, at the dawn of another day, discovered by Sephora, whose distraction for his absence knew no bounds. Not seeing him, as usual, enter his tent the night before, she scarcely doubted but some accident had befallen him, and dispatched scouts in different directions, to ascertain the truth: some of these she herself followed, until chance led her to search the shed where he indeed lay, pale and exhausted. The young woman in whose cause he suffered, but whose charity and sympathy were worthy of civilized existence, comprehending the interest Sephora had in the invalid, hastened to present to her the

the arrow that had been extracted from his arm: Sephora, then far advanced in her pregnancy, swooned away. It was two days ere Elnathan could be removed in a litter to the camp, where he had also brought the aged Helvetian, that every assistance might be rendered for his recovery. In the course of some days, the invalids were restored to health; but Sephora recovered not the impression of alarm she had received, until the moment of her delivery; her infant, too, partook of its mother's drooping state—it was born weakly, and bore on its forehead the memorial of the danger its father had been exposed to.

This occurrence would be alone worthy of relation, as shewing the generosity and kindness that marked the disposition of Elnathan, even when most blinded by ambition, as also the devoted affection towards him of the amiable Sephora.

If Elnathan and Zabdi tasted of domestic felicity, with the exception of occasional

occasional inquietudes about the health of their children and beloved partners, the constant attention required by public affairs, with the ingratitude and malice shewn them by their countrymen, afforded them constant subject of pain; they began to feel how chimerical is the hope of the virtuous man, in a public capacity, to obtain universal and steady applause.

The frequent wars of Nebuchadnezzar had laid his subjects under immense contributions, which excited their murmurs, murmurs that were repaid by him with acts of tyranny. Elnathan and Zabdi continually represented to him, that the only sure means of securing his power with advantage, was to retrench the public expenditure, to diminish the number of his courtiers, and to introduce a new system of morals, less licentious than the present.

It is easy to imagine that such counsels, added to other hints contained in the system of war and legislation already offered

fered by the brothers, excited against them powerful enemies in every class; loud were the declamations against these new and contracted reformers; but Elnathan and Zabdi had now entered their five-and-fortieth year, the prime of life was past, and they saw the necessity of being, in future, guided by caution and the dictates of experience.

ELNATHAN,

OR,

THE AGES OF MAN.

BOOK VII.

BOOK VII.

The Age of Maturity.

THE Chaldean empire was now mounted on the ruin of other states to the zenith of glory; luxury and immorality had kept pace with its conquests: but God, who ever abases the wicked man who proudly exalteth himself over the humble, and such as put their trust in Heaven, presently ordained the rapid decline of this famous monarchy of Babylon.

The first reverse it experienced, was a season of excessive rigour and scarcity; a winter, such as the Chaldean had never seen, shed its perishing influence within

the capital and surrounding provinces, to which Nature had hitherto been ever indulgent. Immense heaps of snow seemed to double the heights of Taurus; and the sharp winds, impetuously wafted, for a length of time, from those icy regions, not only congealed the rivers and fountains in its neighbourhood, but hardened to such a depth the surface of the earth, that the roots and seeds committed to its bosom, perished ere the genial rays of the sun had power to free their passage. The feathered tribe, no longer able to gather nourishment from the earth, soared aloft only to fall back, cold and motionless; the howling of the quadrupeds bespoke the famine to which they became victims; men disputed, by force of arms, the grossest food; while the victorious in these horrid combats, gained only the privilege of expiring a few days or few hours later over the bloody remains of their fellows. Cries of suffering, of fury, menaces, reached the

the ears of Nebuchadnezzar; he beheld heaps of dead intercept the ways, even stop up the avenues to his palace, until at length the air became infected, and the waters impregnated with unwholesome particles.

Elnathan and Zabdi, afflicted to the utmost, at length, by their exertions, were able to afford relief to the public misfortune. The former precipitated, as might be said, an immense army of hungry troops towards the frontiers of the southern nations nearest to Babylon, and menaced them with instant plunder, did they not consent to dispose of their overplus of grain to Nebuchadnezzar at a reasonable price. Zabdi dispatched able negociators to the farthest corners of the earth, to tempt their inhabitants, by the exchange of gold and articles of luxury, to dispense the necessaries of life.

But, though the torrent of destruction was stemmed, a deep wound had been made in the breast of the Chaldeans,

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which failed not to be irritated by the seditious and discontented, who imputed the late evils to the luxury and extravagance of the court, to the continual wars of the monarch, which deprived agriculture of its most useful assistance: the ministers, too, were blamed for their want of foresight, in not preventing evils that they afterwards employed such ruinous measures to remedy.

If the amiable Sephora felt for the community in general during this distressing period of scarcity, it can be imagined how deeply she was touched for the distresses of her parents and their neighbours: no sooner was she thoroughly acquainted with them, than it was her care to transport to her native home, a large share of her domestic stores; even confiding, a second time, the care of her family to Mara, she repaired thither herself, to distribute a portion of the necessaries procured from abroad. She was greeted with blessings; for

for the faithful Saaph and the compassionate Mesron had duly scattered her first presents amidst the companions of her infancy and her youth.

When Sephora had attended to the most pressing wants of her friends, and had provided seeds for the earth, she repaired beneath the auspices of the high-priest Naaman, to return thanks to Heaven for having, by its special bounty, granted the means of relief to her native soil. She ascended the holy mount of Anoth amidst a host of followers, young and old, chanting hymns to God, in gratitude for his favours, and in intercession for the souls of the Chaldeans, who had fallen under the scourge of the most dreadful famine that had ever desolated the earth. Vehicles, charged with grain and wine, followed this procession, that, after the law of the Israelites, so favourable to the proselyte and the stranger, they might be delivered to the high-

priest, for the benefit of such as sought his counsel or charity.

Naaman welcomed Sephora as an angel of peace; in presence of the whole congregation he pronounced on her his blessing; then turning into his holy sanctuary, he raised his voice in tones the most touching, and made its dome resound in praises of Heaven's bounty. Sephora and her friends who followed, remained not silent, their love and gratitude were also re-echoed. What sounds so affecting as the grateful effusions of the virtuous?

Their religious performances at an end, the former neighbours of Naaman returned home; nor would they first partake of refreshment, having determined to render their pilgrimage more sacred by a fast, that was to endure from the dawn of day till after sunset. Sephora, however, returned not with them; she had resolved on proceeding to Eleana, and, in honour of the memory of Ezriel and

Anna,

Anna, there distribute, in their former neighbourhood, charitable donations.— At Eleana she received new blessings, for it still continued the resort of the sick and needy, Anna, previous to her death, having established within her dwelling a successor, endowed, like her, with the power of relieving distress.

When she had gratified her benevolent and affectionate inclinations, Sephora and two attendants again took the road to the abode of her parents. About noon, on the day she expected to arrive, she perceived, not far removed from the highway, a man, rather past the prime of life, stretched beneath the shade of two plane-trees: he rested on his elbow, while his hand supported his cheek; it was pale, and grief or sickness seemed to arrest his steps. Sephora stopped her car, with the intention of administering to his comfort, if possible. The stranger perceived her not, his eyes were half closed,

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and he appeared absorbed within himself. Sephora heard him breathe a deep sigh, and her interest being much awakened, she descended from her car, and approached him. As she stood beside him, he started up, and shewed her at once a countenance whose majesty was tempered by an air of tender sorrow.

"May I ask, noble stranger," said she, "what brings you hither? for your features denote no mean origin, and your habiliment betrays you are not a native of this country."

"Alas! misfortune, lady, brings me hither!" replied the unknown in the Chaldaic language, which, though he spoke correctly, it was plain was not his native tongue.

"What country gave you birth?" inquired Sephora.

"To Egypt I owe my birth and education."

"And yet you are far distant from it, and

and unfortunate," said Sephora; willing to invite the stranger to confidence—"Friends, parents, have you none?"

"My mother, and a tenderer one never was, lives, and lives in Egypt; my father—oh! I know not how to say!—Lady, I can only tell you, that my steps are hither bent in search of a friend, whose sympathy and wisdom I know can be relied on; he was my early companion, and, I should think, dwells not far from hence."

"May I ask his name?"

"He is Elnathan, son of the once wise and virtuous Abessalom."

"Elnathan! he is my husband! and not now to be found within his hereditary domains—he is at Babylon!"

"Indeed!—Ah! there I will not seek him; the tumult and gaiety of that dissolute capital would but ill assort with my habits of solitude and sorrow."

"Since Elnathan was early known to you, your acquaintance was perhaps formed

formed within the college at Memphis?"

"You say right."

"And your name, is it a mystery?"

"Your words, your tone, fair lady, assure me there can be no danger in confiding in the wife of Elnathan—Benoni I was called."

"What!" cried Sephora, in a voice of eager joy, "are you indeed the son of the amiable Dina?"

"Truly the same," replied Benoni, in a whisper, lest he should be overheard by the attendants of Sephora; "but guard, I beseech you, my secret, nor mention to other than Elnathan that I yet live; else may every future hope of happiness be frustrated for me, for one, too, who lives in hope (alas! I fear, vain hope) of enjoying with me."

Sephora assured Benoni of her discretion, and without diving further into his secrets, invited him to proceed, and spend with her three weeks that she was yet to

remain

remain in the spot that gave her birth, "even in the same," said she, "where the father of Elnathan, the great Abessalom, provided for us, ere his retreat to heaven, a comfortable and rural abode, and where reign piety and simplicity."

Benoni readily agreed to the proposition of Sephora; he placed himself beside her in her chariot, and they arrived in a few hours at the same happy abode, where every virtue and every grace contended to adorn the brows of Abessalom and Noëma.

Sephora, as yet, was acquainted but with a small portion of the secrets of Benoni; nor was she content with half confidence; her upright and compassionate soul longed to be mistress of the whole, that she might pour the balm of pity and sympathy into the wounded heart. Lest her anxiety might be mistaken for curiosity, and that her guest might be encouraged by farther intimacy, she suffered another day to elapse

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ere she farther touched on the subject of that dejection which marked his air and manners. Towards the close of the day after their arrival, and when no auditors were at hand, she ventured to invite his confidence—"Prince," said she, "from our cradle to the present moment, but one soul has animated the bosoms of Elnathan and me; what you would, therefore, confide to him, believe that I am worthy also to hear; though it may not be within my power to remedy your griefs, to sympathize with them will not surely be denied me. I am already acquainted with the circumstances which gave rise to the union of your mother with the monarch of Egypt, and with the resolution taken by that wise prince, to regard you as his son equally with Amalek, and to raise to the throne whichever of you should prove most worthy: deign then, without fear, to account for your present situation."

"I cannot hesitate, amiable Sephora," replied

replied Benoni, "to trust to you the anxiety of my heart: the affection of Elnathan for you, I am aware, is of long standing; and even our short acquaintance leaves me no doubt of the kindness and discretion that dwells within your breast.

"Six years since, the monarch of Egypt (whose government has been ever irreproachable, though his heart may have lost its kindness) declared me successor to his throne; at the same time, he endeavoured, by tokens of favour and affection, to soften the disappointment of Amalek, who, on every account, was most worthy of the distinction, but in whom his father traced not that magnanimity and quickness of perception which he thought requisite to govern. Long did I refuse the proffered honour, believing that I usurped the rights of Amalek; but the king was absolute, and I was obliged to cede to his desires. Soon, however, did I heartily abjure my exaltation.

tation. It was of consequence, as Elnathan can well explain to you, that the choice of the king should be well supported by the sacerdotal college of Memphis: to this end, therefore, at my inauguration as heir apparent, the king declared that I should, without delay, become united to the granddaughter of Cherub, who was president of the university. My blood froze, as I listened to the decree.

"Although nearly arrived at my eighth lustre, I had hitherto, under an appearance of insensibility and expressed repugnance to marriage, been able to elude all propositions on the subject; it was even suspected that I was wholly incapable of love. Alas! long had my heart concentrated its most vivid flames, notwithstanding the assertion of cowards or fools, that to conceal a strong passion from all the world is impossible: in fact, love can only be true that can, when required, sacrifice itself to an excess of

prudence

prudence and forbearance. Zelika was the object of my secret adoration; she was brought up by my mother, and claimed her peculiar care, from being the daughter of that unfortunate woman, who, repenting of her errors, but dreading punishment, had swallowed poison, as she revealed the guilty exchange which had controverted the destiny of the prince Amalek, and placed me in his stead. Love no doubt exalts the object of its worship; yet nothing could be more true than the charms of my Zelika, both personal and mental: her perfect features, her full dark eyes, beaming tenderness and intelligence; her form, at once dignified and graceful; her manners, mild and unaffected; her understanding, improved by learning's richest lore—Oh! she was formed to bless and be blessed!

"Though our hearts were closely united, and that we had found means to breathe our wishes to each other, to have betrayed

betrayed my passion for Zelika to others, by either word or look, would have been death to every hope, instantly would she have been snatched from my sight: no other plan was left, then, but carefully to conceal our affection during the life-time of the king. I had no idea that his successor would be declared while he yet lived; and if, after his decease, the choice should fall upon me, I should then be at liberty to share my throne as it best pleased me. If indeed Amalek inherited, I should no less be happy as a subject; for, finally declared as such, I might possess the wife of my choice. With these prospects, I eluded every proposal of matrimony that was offered; and Zelika, too, reached her six-and-twentieth year, without being prevailed on to change her state. But, alas! the intentions of the king admitted neither evasion or reply: I bowed respectfully before this prince, become terrible in the eyes of his subjects, when he prescribed to me to espouse,

pouse, in two days, the granddaughter of the high-priest of Egypt.

"The following night, however, I penned a billet to Zelika, expressive of my contempt for any station in which she was not to share, and exhorting her to hope and patience; after which I secretly quitted the court, resolving never to return until I should become wholly my own master. During six years, I have wandered through different countries; some gold and jewels, which belonged to me in Egypt, and which I took from thence, together with the exercise of various arts, liberal and mechanical, the knowledge of which I acquired at Memphis, have provided for my subsistence. Too much agitated by hopes and fears, I have no wish to settle in any one spot, till report (which informs me that my mother yet lives) shall bring me the news of her husband's death. However afflicting this event ought to be for a subject whom he had generously adopted for his

son

son and successor, I cannot help regarding it as the only one that can restore me to peace or hope.

"Such, amiable Sephora, are the particulars of my situation, and such the causes which have conducted my footsteps into the bosom of sympathy and friendship."

Sephora was surprised and affected by the recital of Benoni, whose tears, as he concluded it, were met by hers; she endeavoured to console him with the idea that constant love is ever rewarded; and, during a fortnight that he remained in her society, she neglected no means of dissipating and soothing his melancholy, without, however, once seeking to banish from his remembrance its original object. The most agreeable resource she believed it in her power to afford him, was frequent converse with Chœreas and Susanna, as also with Saaph and Mesron, all of whom loved to inspire him with a taste for the simple and innocent manners

ners of their country; from the society of Moria, above all, did Sephora imagine her guest would derive consolation.

Moria had long arrived at that point of abstraction from all earthly considerations, which such are used to attain whose souls have felt the rude attacks of a tragical passion, and who, at length, are bereft of all other hope than what piety and repentance afford. Since the disastrous event of her youth, Moria had never known one moment of unalloyed felicity; the contemplation of the virtues of Abessalom and Noëma had been the purest of her enjoyments; the education of her daughter, he[illegible] pected mee[illegible]g with Saphat, the union o[illegible] with Zabdi, were all pleasures of a sor[illegible]ful nature, for they were associated with [illegible]he recollection of past distracting events. Her resignation and dependance on Heaven were now so perfect, that, in her letters to her daughter, she even beseeched of her to remain at Babylon, nor, by the

tumultuous

tumultuous pleasure her presence would occasion, interrupt that equanimity of soul she had obtained. More just in her reflections on life than most of the philosophers of her time, she compared temporal enjoyments to the sweet-scented rose, which, newly blown, offers delight in the gathering of it, but which conceals beneath its blushing leaves a sharp-pointed thorn.

“ And what,” said she one day to him [illegible]m the wife of Elnathan had led into [illegible] cence, “ oh weak mortal! causes [illegible]e de[illegible] of thy looks, and the tear [illegible]t is s[illegible]dy to start into thine eye? [illegible] ther temporary or [illegible]r separatio[illegible]r creature, whose eternal, from [illegible] constan[illegible]d rely on? Alas! constancy is a [illegible]easure scarcely to be found; the passion for admiration, that second passion of woman's nature, bars its establishment in her breast; or, should it even take root, and that she preserves, for the husband as for the lover, the first offer-

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ings of her virtue, how generally does the love of power incident to our sex, prepare for him, bound in the chains of Hymen, moments of constant disquiet, whether he bows to its call, or whether he attempts to oppose it by the exercise of reason, or of that conscious superiority, his birthright?

"I well know that two beings, on the eve of blending their fates, delude themselves with the flattering hope of mutually giving birth to new objects that shall strengthen their ties, whose smiles and caresses, whose budding reason and growing strength, shall charm the self-love of parents, and render twofold their affection for each other. Trifling hopes! and often vain as trifling!

"Elsewhere, but in this peaceful valley, the fruits of your conjugal tenderness, oh deluded mortals! are either snatched from you in their spring of life, or they are perfectioned with the revivifying assistance of your sunny days, only

to cast off the autumn or the winter of your life (after having perhaps, in various ways, provoked your feeble state) scarce and sterile looks of pity. Happy, even in these degenerate times, may you be, if your offspring at length turn not wholly from you their wearied attention, nor yet watch the moment when they shall be happily freed from your importunity.

"If not love," continued Moria, "is it ambition, then, whom experience should, ere now, have lessened, whose shocks and fabled successes you regret? and have you not observed how frail the bases on which have rested the first thrones and governments of the earth? shaken by secret and renewed adversity, agitated by contradictory opinions, undermined by licentiousness and sedition, by the very endeavours of those who perhaps have most experienced the benefits of sovereignty, but who have been led from the sacred path of truth and friendship,

friendship, as the hope offered of exalting themselves. Ah! how can men who command, or aspire to command, regard without shuddering those heights to which they have attained, or to which they are climbing! No, felicity is not to be met on earth; or, at least, it consists only in meditating on the tomb."

Benoni listened with wonder and delight to the eloquence of the sainted Moria, which was often poured forth to him in discourses like the present.

It was in the middle of the night, and after an evening spent with her and Sephora, that Benoni, while the latter slept profoundly, stole softly into her apartment, and took from a table next her bed the key of her dwelling, in order to commence a journey, of which none other than himself knew the motive or term.

On awaking in the morning, Sephora sees with surprise her chamber door open; she looks around for the key she

was accustomed at night to place near her—it was gone; while, in its place, was to be found a jewel of great value. She could not doubt but this was a token of the Egyptian's gratitude; she calls him, she searches for him, her attendants tread the garden and avenues around, but Benoni was nowhere to be found—he had completely disappeared.

After this event, Sephora yet tasted eight days of the society of her parents, and of the love and gratitude of their neighbours. She then repaired to Babylon, to the arms of her children and husband. She looked on her arrival as dictated by Providence; her beloved Mara lay suffering in a raging fever, which it required the presence and cares of her earliest friend at length to subdue. She was many weeks ere she returned to health.

At this time, Nebuchadnezzar was not far removed from the term of his earthly career; the few years he afterwards lived, were

were marked for him by painful solicitudes, extreme humiliations, and frequent terrors; his subjects yet preserved for his past grandeur some remains of respect, but their hearts were alienated from him; he was even as a superb cedar, which formerly towered to the skies, and shadowed a large tract of earth with its luxuriant foliage, but which, stripped of its branches by the assaults of many winters, presents only an enormous trunk cleft by the lapse of time, and from which the traveller, though he may be attracted by some scattered sprouts to dwell on its former grandeur, turns, loving not its decayed aspect.

The monarchs and nations who had trembled before Nebuchadnezzar, nay, who were prostrate at his feet, now in silence began to raise their heads, and assemble the means of rising upon his ruins; so the young cedars, which the parent trunk had shadowed and choaked with its projecting roots, at length sprout

up with vigour, even tower above the parent stem, and totally deprive it of light and nourishment.

Elnathan, and the military leaders under his command, yet endeavoured, by every possible means, to render their master dreaded by the Medes, Persians, and the various nations of the north, who had wrestled under the power of the conqueror, and who were ready to spring up anew to his dismay. All that the wisdom of Zabdi could suggest was also adopted, to retard the downfal of the monarchy, and prevent it from being trampled by the foe; but Nebuchadnezzar was soon obliged to acknowledge the insufficiency of human power, and that divine Providence alone can sustain or destroy nations, according to their desert.

But those who avow their weakness only when every resource of power and rage is exhausted, rise not, but, by every new step, recede farther from the height they

they would regain. The Chaldean monarch judged, rightly, no doubt, that the evils he of late years suffered, were the consequence of his adherence to a false mode of worship; he thence absurdly concluded, that it was his duty to punish with the utmost severity, all dissenters from the law of Moses. Elnathan and Zabdi, though strict followers of this creed, deeply lamented the persecuting measures adopted by their king to propagate, or rather render it odious; they dared to express their disapprobation, but it was in gentle accents, for years had rendered them timid, and led them to expect more from patience than decision.

The too late repentance of Nebuchadnezzar, however, was not able to avert the punishment of Heaven; his bodily sufferings became great, he exhibited a humiliating picture of mortality; and at length expired, charging his successor to avoid his example, in employing power

to the prejudice of humanity. Evilmerodac, his son, was declared king of Babylon, at the period when Elnathan and Zabdi had attained the fiftieth year of their age.

Evilmerodac took, as a partner to his throne, Nitocris, a princess of strong understanding, and well-schooled in adversity: she was daughter to a venerable prince, elected as their governor by the Sarmatians, but who, on account of intestine divisions, had never been permitted to exercise his authority.

After some feeble efforts to restore the monarchy of Chaldea to its former splendour, its new king, allured into the paths of vice by interested and fawning courtiers, as well as by his own naturally corrupt inclinations, sunk into a state of torpor, from which he could only be roused by the suggestion of the most vicious and depraved appetites.

To seize the fit moments to be silent or loud, as the temper of the monarch dictated;

dictated; sometimes to exercise severity, but never injustice; secretly to repair, as far as it was possible, and as the negligence of their ruler gave leave, the dreadful evils which his conduct engendered for the military establishments and the civil tribunals of the kingdom, were the constant employments of Elnathan and Zabdi, during the five last years of their maturer age, and by which they were happily able to suspend, during that period of the reign of Evilmerodac, the final dissolution of the state.

Within this term, came to be celebrated a female wonder in Babylon; this was a woman past her meridian, who had been settled some time within the capital; but, although desirous of living there a retired life, her striking beauty, her desire to be charitable and useful, which led her successfully to succour her neighbours, both by counsel and cares, the infinity and variety of her knowledge, excited by degrees, and in despite of her-

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self, general enthusiasm—all ranks were anxious to consult and render her homage.

What was the surprise of Zabdi, to hear this woman, whose beauty lent new charms to her eloquence, descant upon the misfortunes that threatened the Babylonian empire, upon the resources that it yet contained, upon what encouraged, retarded, and might prevent the revolutions of various states! She described the past with such force, that it became present; she noted with justice and perspicuity the events which were likely to arise out of the present; in short, a profound acquaintance with history, morals, politics, and the several branches of philosophy, rendered her nearly an oracle. The statesman cultivated her acquaintance, as tending to enlighten and instruct him; and at length their friendship grew, till he was used to consult her upon all dubious and difficult subjects.

Mara,

Mara, arrived at that period when the wisest and most amiable women become uneasy lest their fading charms should give them less power over the hearts of their husbands, saw not with composure the auxiliary Zabdi had obtained in affairs of state; she could not forbear indeed often betraying fretfulness on this subject, fretfulness that at length came to the ears of the fair stranger. Ingenuous as wise, she visited the wife of the minister, and during a prolonged discourse, took means to convince her, that, though Chaldea in general claimed her friendship, not one of its subjects could ever share her love.

It was after this interview, which reassured the domestic repose of Mara and Zabdi, that a cause was to be tried before the king and his council, which interested and divided the opinions of the capital. The illustrious father of Moria, the wise and just Saphat, at his death, left the ingenious and virtuous Eubulus

in possession of the hermitage and its dependencies in the forest, near to his palace of Ithamar. The artist, after having covered the sepulchre of his venerable friend, yet thought of exercising his genius and leisure in erecting beside it two other tombs, one to contain hereafter the remains of Moria, the other destined for himself: he had worked for some months at his plan, and was one day reclined against a block of marble destined to complete it, when he heard the approach of footsteps, and in a few moments after, was accosted by a traveller, of a pleasing and noble appearance —"Virtuous sage," said he to Eubulus, "thy talents and goodness I have heard of; but it has been difficult to me to find thee, since true merit, it seems, loves close concealment. I have a strong desire to share thy solitude; thou art far advanced in years, while I am not yet past my prime, possessing health and vigour. The knowledge of sculpture and architecture

architecture are not foreign to me; might I not then become worthy of seizing the chissel, which time must let drop from thy hands?—Suffer me, I pray thee, to assist thy labours, and gain from thee instruction. As a reward, I may not offer thee gold; but I will promise to cultivate for thee the choicest plants and wholesomest fruits, and to lead thy little flock to those pastures fittest to enrich their milk, and give it power to renew thy strength."

Eubulus looked with some surprise at the stranger; but observing sincerity pictured on his brow, and feeling besides the helplessness of age, he acceded to his offer, and from that moment granted him within his cave the vacant cell of Saphat.

The days of the two anchorites continued to flow, during four years, in a course of piety and rural occupations, in that branch of the fine arts whose charm had united them, even in peace and con-

ntment,

tentment, if we except frequent sighs, which were breathed by the stranger beneath the shade of myrtle and cypress-trees, yet always at a distance from Eubulus, lest their sound should cast heaviness over the evening of his days.

One early morn of spring, Eubulus called in haste to the companion of his solitude—" I feel," said he, " that this will be for me a momentous day; give me then thy arm, and lead me to that sacred spot where we have toiled together, and which I have intended as my last resting-place—I have a secret there to communicate to thee."

The pupil of Eubulus, with unsteady steps, obeys his venerable friend, to whom he is ardently devoted. Arrived together at the edge of the tomb which the old man had prepared for himself, he said to his conductor—" My friend, although thou hast ever refused to confide to me thy destiny hitherto, I am sure that thou cherishest virtue with too much ardour

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not to have tasted misfortune in this vale of tears. Remember, however, that it is amongst the immutable decrees of Providence, that the sorrows of the virtuous shall meet their happy term. In the meanwhile, my dear friend, receive from my hand this letter for Moria, the daughter of him who gave to me these solitudes; she is already acquainted with the cares I have bestowed on her last asylum, and she will no doubt, according to my request, secure to you, after my demise, the possession of our retreat, while it may please thee to remain in it."

Eubulus was unable to proceed, paleness overspread his countenance, and he drooped his head. His friend was now thoroughly alarmed; he was penetrated with the conviction that he would soon be deserted.

Eubulus made another effort—"Oh God!" said he, faltering, "receive a sinner, who ever believed in thy promises and followed thy laws!—Farewell,

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my friend!" and he sunk back in the arms of his companion, and breathed his last sigh. This last uttered a cry of horror, and, unable to retain his hold of the stiffened form of the old man, it fell back into the receptacle prepared for it.

Despair struck to the heart of the stranger at thus suddenly losing his only friend, one in whose agreeable society he had so long quelled a series of anxieties; the voice of interest, to whom he had never sacrificed, was wholly despised, and he tore to atoms the writing which was to assure him independance. The former companion of Eubulus then prostrated himself on the brink of the grave, and vented his grief in tears and groans; groans so loud and often repeated, that they drew the attention of some travellers, who passed at the distance of half a parasang. They stop and listen, and listen again, until they are excited to approach the spot from whence those sounds of anguish proceed: they find a

man

man stretched on the brink of a tomb; they bend forward, and perceive another laid beneath; his garments are on; they touch him—he is scarcely cold. The travellers question him who lies stretched; he answers not, he will give no account of himself. They take his silence for a token of remorse, and the groans he uttered, they believed proceeded from his victim, who lies in the tomb. Alas! suspicion and distrust are the constant attendants of our riper years!

Though no direct proof encouraged these proceedings, the virtuous friend of Eubulus, who merely cast looks of horror and disdain upon his accusers, nor would say from whence he came or to whom he belonged, was secured, and conducted as a malefactor to Babylon, there to answer, before the king and council, the charge of his being a murderer.

Evilmerodac had known and respected Eubulus, and now believed it his duty to have

have carefully sounded the charges against him presumed to be his murderer, from the hope of enjoying his fortune. The culprit was privately examined; but he would only simply assert his innocence, shed some tears, and express his carelessness about life.

On the day appointed for the trial of this cause, which excited universal interest, a great concourse of all ranks assembled, at an early hour, in the great hall of justice. At the third hour after midday, the first magistrates of the city and the councillors of state entered according to their ranks, and were followed by Evilmerodac, who became seated beneath a magnificent canopy, while, on his right and left, were arranged those who were entitled to assist him in his decision. The prosecution commenced, and the circumstances that gave rise to it clearly stated; they might or might not be worthy of attention, it was impossible to decide; it were to be wished that more

more proof could appear against the accused, who certainly could not escape unblemished. To render the matter more clear, the king ordered that the culprit should undergo a fresh examination in his presence. He was accordingly led forth, while all the beholders were struck with his noble and dignified mien, even while his person was debased by chains.

"Who are you?" demanded the monarch.

"My name," replied the prisoner, "is the secret of love, and no dread of undeserved punishment can make me reveal it."

"What do I see? what do I hear?" wildly exclaimed a female voice; and immediately, from a retired part of the hall, issued through the crowd her who was the admiration of Babylon, the friend and counseller of Zabdi—"Sire," said she, stopping at the feet of the monarch, "the prisoner is incapable of the attrocious act attributed to him; in him you behold

behold the prince Benoni, son to the illustrious queen of Egypt, and designed by her husband (whose death has been just announced to you), ten years ago, to succeed him on the throne. Interrogate, I pray thee, the Egyptian ambassador, who arrived but a few days ago, to signify the decease of his master, and to inform you of his son Amalek being raised to the throne; he is, even now, in the tribune opposite, and will bear witness to my truth." Then rushing into the arms of Benoni, this female personage exclaimed—"Heroic prince! most constant of lovers! you at length enjoy the triumph of virtue and of love. Before God and the great king, let us exchange our vows, let us publicly acknowledge that attachment which has so long lain hidden within our bosoms!"

The disinterested and passionate Benoni, struck by the equity of Heaven, inebriated with the accents of love, and affected by the death of the king his benefactor,

nefactor, is unable to articulate. He raises his eyes in gratitude to Heaven, presses Zelika to his heart, and then places his right hand within that of hers.

The ambassador of Egypt advanced, certified the presence of him whom his late master had elected to the throne, and bowed the knee before him.

At this movement, Benoni exclaimed— "Arise, minister of Amalek, I am no less his subject than thee; his birth gave him a right to reign, far beyond what the blind esteem of his father gave to me. May he long enjoy his throne, while the utmost of my wishes will be fulfilled in becoming the husband of Zelika."

Evilmerodac ordered the chains which fettered the ankles of Benoni to be knocked off, and he even invited the lovers to be seated next to him. Not wishing, however, that the assembly should disperse without being fully instructed in all the circumstances of this adventure, and irrefragibly satisfied of the innocence

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of the prince, he called upon him and Zelika successively to relate the causes which had led to their unexpected and joyful meeting at such a critical moment.

Benoni then repeated, in clear and unhesitating accents, all that Abessalom had hitherto known of his destiny; his meeting with Sephora, and all which he had related to her: he added, that being inspired, by the recitals of Moria, with a strong desire to share the solitude of Eubulus, but still wishing that curiosity might not be excited as to his real name, he had secretly quitted the dwelling of Sephora, leaving behind, as a feeble tribute of his gratitude, a jewel given him by the late king of Egypt. It was long, he said, ere he could find the abode of Eubulus; but that having reached it, and looking on it as indeed the spot where he could best sooth his cares, and wait for the moment when he might return to Egypt (if indeed such a one should ever arrive), he had engaged Eubulus to

adopt

adopt him as the partner of his toils, and the support of his old age. Benoni then, with tearful eyes, described the exit of his venerable friend, the legacy he had left him, and how he (Benoni), in the paroxysm of his grief, had destroyed the insurance of it; he mentioned the groans he had uttered, the state of stupor that had succeeded, and how cruelly the travellers attributed to him guilt, when his heart was only rent with the tenderest sorrow; nor would he, on his arrival at Babylon, claim the protection of Elnathan and Zabdi, his fellow-students, lest it might lead to a discovery of his name and rank.

The recital of Zelika was shorter, but not less affecting than that of Benoni. Not to suspend during too long the life of Elnathan, we shall be content with some principal extracts from it.

Penetrated with grief for the departure of her lover from Egypt, and dreading lest any suspicion should arise of the true

true motive of it (for then would her liberty be for ever sacrificed), Zelika determined also upon flight. Having been disposed, from her infancy, to the acquirement of knowledge, and, above all, to the study of such means as might render her useful to her fellow-creatures, she despaired not of being able, in a foreign land, to provide for her subsistence; she encouraged also the hope of one day being reunited to the object of her tenderness. She confided to Jabel, her trusty and affectionate maid, her intention of quitting Memphis; and the night succeeding the day on which the flight of Benoni was made public, they both escaped, Zelika little regretting the tumultuous pleasures of a court. She carried with her some gold and jewels, the presents of the queen, and, disguised beneath the humblest attire, marched, during several days, through thick forests, she and her attendants concealing themselves at night within the caverns formed by Nature, or

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in the most wretched huts, where they were able to purchase the grossest food. Beyond the boundaries of Egypt, they traversed part of the desert of Arabia. Arrived at length on the confines of Chaldea, they entered the dwelling of a humble Levite: he and his wife were bowed down by years, yet were they famed in their neighbourhood for charity and hospitality. Here Zelika and Jabel lived during two years, hailed by these good people as angels sent to smooth their path to another world.—Zelika now studied the Chaldaic, and amused herself with comparing and adding to the instruction her mind was already stored with. Death, at short intervals, striking the generous couple, whom Zelika and Jabel tended with filial care, they resolved on repairing to Babylon, where, from its extensive circle and immense population, they would, under borrowed names, be able to live retired; here, too, they would gain cer-

tain intelligence of the court of Memphis, and might even meet with Benoni.

Unhappily Jabel, some months after her arrival at Babylon, was attacked by such an ardent desire to revisit her country, that she sunk under its pressure, and left her mistress isolated upon earth: yet Zelika found resources for her affliction in her ardent pursuit of learning, which, with her unremitting attention to the cares and wants of those immediately around her, procured her at length that reputation she was far from pretending to. To no Babylonian, not even to Elnathan and Zabdi, who had gained her highest esteem, had she confided her history. Her story concluded with affirming, that an anxious principle of curiosity had led her forth to witness in secret a trial that excited such general interest, and which, for her, had led to the gratification of every earthly wish.

The eloquence and grace with which Benoni and Zelika related their adventures,

tures, excited the admiration of all the auditors; and the desire of many to find a criminal in Benoni, was rapidly changed into lively interest for him and the beauteous Zelika. Evilmerodac, his queen, and Cyprus, the widow of the late king, loaded them with presents, and with reluctance consented to their departure for Memphis, which at length took place, under escort of the Egyptian ambassador. The lovers tasted the purest enjoyment, on again beholding the august Dina, in acknowledging the sovereignty of Amalek, and in celebrating, under his auspices, their long-desired union: they obtained permission from their king to reside with Dina, within the domains of Abiathar, her first husband; here they terminated a length of happy and peaceful days. They had the less reason to grieve for not leaving behind them any posterity, as Elnathan and Zabdi were not so entirely repaid by their children and wards, as was the good Abessalom

and Noëma. But the age was changed; Heaven allows nations gradually to reach an exalted pitch of perfection, and then encourages their decline, whether because it believes them unable long to support their brilliant fortune, or that it fears they may value themselves too highly on their varied productions, and thus forget their total dependance on the Creator.

Abessalom and Noëma passed their brightest years in unruffled calm; it was not without great precaution, nor until they had, for a length of time, breathed their native air, that they suffered their children to view the world, and thence extend their views, and learn a just distrust of themselves. But Elnathan and Zabdi, at the period of their children's birth, had their station on a tumultuous and vicious theatre, where they were denied the means of impressing the opening senses of their offspring with Nature's simple and beauteous aspect; neither

was

was Elnathan, at a more advanced period, careful enough to remove his sons to some foreign shore, where morality was more esteemed than at Babylon; his vanity, encouraged by the example of his personal success, led him to consider it a misfortune, were they to be removed from under the parental auspices.

Mara, to whose lot it often fell to direct entirely the education of Zara, Theena, and Saba, conceived such a dread of the profligacy of the Babylonian morals, that she indulged not her pupils in that consciousness of liberty, whose charm she had herself tasted under the eyes of Moria, even till the day of her union with Zabdi; indeed we must confess, her plan of education was too often tinctured by severity. How seldom parents, of the soundest judgments, adhere to that plan of instruction, however good it may appear to them, by which their own youth has been conducted! they can scarce re-

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sist the temptation which power offers to them to introduce alteration.

We must here remember, that the management of our Chaldeans and their wives had been successfully employed during the youth of Sophonius, Azer, and Aspar, to their hereafter forming a triple alliance with Zara, Saba, and Theeena; but a passion which is dictated, seldom partakes of the ardour of one that is purely voluntary, or loves like that to which obstacles are opposed. The parents with regret observed, as their children advanced, that their matrimonial projects for them might possibly be frustrated; that Sophonius frequently left the side of Zara to place himself by Saba, while Azer often sought the daughter of Zabdi and Mara: it was no longer, as in the time of Abessalom and Noëma, and as in their rural scenes, when these, once attracted to each other by sympathy, sufficed ever after to their mutual happiness.

Elnathan

Elnathan perceived that, at Babylon, the affection of two lovers must be sharpened by restraint; and that there was danger of satiety, from their indulging too much of each other's society. On this account, he determined that Sophonius, more susceptible of new impressions, and more obstinate in his inclinations than Azer, should undertake a journey from Chaldea; that perhaps, tasting even some of the trifling vicissitudes of life, he might be led to long once more for the happiness contrived for him by his parents, principally in a marriage with the lovely and sensible Zara. Not to let his travels be devoid of an object, Zabdi induced Evilmerodac to name Sophonius, now in his twenty-fifth year, to a part in the embassy he was dispatching into Greece.

This republic remained the faithful ally of Babylon, while other states were successfully turning to their advantage the corruption of its government and the discontent of its subjects. Elnathan

and Zabdi continued ever intent on preventing their schemes; but the decline of the empire was too visible, and too many causes concurred to hasten its overthrow, for them longer to flatter themselves with preventing it; they had besides completed their eleventh lustre, that great epoch, which we denominate the decline of life.

ELNATHAN;

OR,

THE AGES OF MAN.

BOOK VIII.

BOOK VIII.

The Decline of Life.

In general, we do not sufficiently mark the kindness of Providence towards those who descend from the age of maturity to that period when their mental and corporeal powers begin to decline: whilst men, who are happily constructed, proceed to the perfect maturing of their reason, dispositions, and conduct, gravity is a diadem which adorns their brows, dignity a mantle which protects their steps from the eye of detraction; they appear to turn with disdain from the path of voluptuous pleasures, nor dare to regard the smile of beauty; with un-

ruffled

ruffled calm, they learn to distrust the intrigues, the projects, the caresses, of their fellow-beings. To penetrate the depths of truth, and render it naked for the eye of the sage; to trim it with flowers for the young, to shield it from the assaults of the profane—such are the only true enjoyments of the virtuous, who tend towards the decline of life: in whatever class they may have been placed, experience and past vicissitudes now teach them to profit by the errors of the past, and to dread the future. But when, at length, the period arrives that they are to descend from their zenith of wisdom, it is admirable to observe the tenderness of Nature in rendering their descent almost imperceptible to themselves, and to see by what gradual movements they arrive at the opposite foot of life's step.

Elnathan and Zabdi then were receding, by gentle degrees, from that vigorous term, when their best faculties bloom-

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ed for the advantage of the Chaldeans, towards that when their energy must slacken, and their efforts, even to do good, become imperfect. Still did they believe themselves complete masters of that steady policy which bends not to opinion, but, with an even hand, holds the scales of justice; indeed, with pure intentions, this self-deception was but natural.

The Chaldeans, though not yet arrived at the commission of crimes that disgraced humanity, plunged daily deeper into the abysses of profligacy and sedition: honour, amongst them, was nearly extinguished—honour, a light unsubstantial, no doubt, yet the necessary guide, in monarchies, to virtue, in all professions: see the flame grow dim, and the soldier becomes a coward, the lawyer grows partial, the mechanic slothful, and the priest, forgetting his sacred duties, abandons himself to sensual enjoyments.

The following occurrence will display in

in how little estimation were held sincerity, gratitude, and religion, in Babylon, as also the defect of that energy and sagacity which hitherto emanated from Zabdi. He had contracted the highest esteem and friendship for the Levite Azor, whom he had even succeeded in placing next the person of Evilmerodac, to explain for him the scriptures, and induce him to interpret truly, and in the pacific sense they merited, the ordinances of Moses. The countenance of Azor betrayed meekness and sincerity, and his whole deportment announced him worthy to be trusted; so that Zabdi, in some degree forgetting that distrust of men which his experience, a few years back, had so justly rendered vigilant, and being also wearied with the immense charge of public affairs, was glad to repose on the faith of Azor, and, according to his suggestions, punish the breach of morality among his fellow-citizens.

The priest one day charged the good Absalom

Absalom to the minister of mocking God, and of being also engaged in seditious broils. Zabdi, surprised and shocked, since he had ever believed the person accused incapable of such irregularities, put, however, the great seal to an order for his secret arrest and confinement within the state prison.

The execution of this mandate was confided to Phineas, ordinarily charged with such commissions, and who had an acquaintance with Absalom, which was unknown to Azor or Zabdi. Phineas was much confounded at a like decree against one whose whole life betrayed only a series of virtues and honest industry; the order, however, was peremptory, although the nature of the charge was not exhibited: he therefore repaired immediately to the house of his friend. Drawing him on one side, he said to him—"Absalom, of what crime art thou guilty?"

"Never,"

"Never," replied Absalom, "has guilt stained the course of my life."

"Hast thou spoken with disrespect of the God of our fathers, or of their worship?"

"Never; Heaven has not a more faithful servant, or one more jealous of its glory."

"Hast thou declaimed against the morals of our king?"

"I mark only in kings the power they derive from God. My eyes and ears are ever shut to rebellion."

"Thy wife is handsome—Hast thou had any cause for jealousy?"

"Never; a more tender or faithful partner I am sure there exists not."

"I am quite at a loss—Behold in my hands the order of the king to conduct thee secretly to the state prison. However, I will endeavour to conciliate this matter, nor fail in my duty. Without returning next thy wife, or saying aught within thy house, haste and conceal thyself

self in the habitation of some sure friend, whom thou wilt name to me. For some days to come, I will feign to the minister that thou hast escaped, and that I am in pursuit of thee, certain of discovering thee, sooner or later. If, within this period, the plans I have in view for thy safety should fail, I however reckon on thy being forthcoming, that I may fulfil my office, and conduct thee as I am directed. Thou knowest Evilmerodac, what a tyrant he is become, and how certainly he would bring destruction on me and mine, could he suspect me of secreting thee from his power; then thyself would finally become his victim."

Absalom promised the utmost exactitude, rendered many thanks to Phineas, and naming to him the spot where he would take refuge, hastened immediately to his concealment, there to remain until, one way or other, he should be called on to step forth.

When night arrived, and darkness enveloped

veloped the city, Phineas, in disguise, glides softly along the avenues encircling the mansion of his friend; for three hours he closely watches the entrance of it, without perceiving, however, any thing there pass to excite his curiosity. At length the hour of midnight comes, and he sees stop at the door of Absalom a litter closely covered, and immediately after a priest (for such his long robes betrayed him to be) come forth, and dismissing his attendants, enter, by means of a private key, the dwelling of the condemned.

"Ah!" said Phineas, "my suspicions are right!—Injured Absalom, thou shalt be revenged!" and he hastened to summon several of his satellites, who were stationed in a neighbouring street. Attended by them, he knocked loudly at the door of his friend. The wife of Absalom called out from the window, to know who was there, and what the visitors wanted?

"It

"It is Absalom we want," said they.

"My husband," said the mistress of the house (for no doubt Azor had told her that Absalom was arrested ere nightfall) "is not here; I have vainly expected him till this moment, nor can I think what has become of him."

"Open the door!" cried Phineas, in a commanding tone; "he is certainly at home, for we saw him enter just now."

The wife of Absalom in vain contested; she was forced without delay to open the door, or run the chance of having it broke in.

Azor had already stripped off his garments, and had just put out the lamp, which might betray his amours; he was unable then to dress himself, or even to seek refuge in a remote corner of the house, ere Phineas approached; his only alternative was to cast himself beneath the bed of the wife of Absalom. She, pale and trembling, having suffered them to enter, followed the officers of justice,

who

who carrying with them a light, quickly discovered the concealment of the Levite.

"Come forth!" said Phineas—"How, Absalom, could you imagine to withdraw yourself from the orders of the king? for no doubt your deplorable conduct has given you just cause to dread his vengeance. Hasten to dress yourself, and follow us to the state prison, where we have orders to conduct you."

Azor came from his refuge—"My friends," said he, "you are mistaken; even my garments, which lie before you, can attest that I am not the person you seek."

"And who," replied Phineas, "would dare to put himself here in the place of Absalom? Surely a Levite, a minister of the Most High, could never be found in the apartment of the wife of Absalom? Oh no! these garments were only intended as a cloak, beneath which you supposed no person would venture to meddle with you: nevertheless, I have discovered

vered the trick. Delay not then to cover yourself with these robes, since they are all that offer, and proceed with me to prison."

Azor, trembling with anxiety, dressed himself. When arrived at the entrance to the street, he again turned to his conductors—"Once more I repeat to you," said he, "that I am not Absalom, and that you may live to repent your obstinacy."

"And who are you, then?" asked Phineas.

"You behold in me," cried Azor proudly, "the friend of Zabdi, prime minister of Babylon."

"Right," said Phineas, "we have even occasion to go to his house ere we proceed to the prison."

Azor again hung his head, and was obliged to proceed with his guards to the house of Zabdi, who was now sunk in sleep.

Phineas, pleading business of the ut-

most

most importance, the servants of the minister summoned their master to arise.

"Sir," said Phineas to Zabdi, leading Azor forward, "here is Absalom the profane, whom you ordered me to arrest; I found him naked, and concealed under his wife's bed; not even the holy garb he had provided himself with, could shield him from just pursuit, nor yet the imposition he attempted, in declaring himself your friend: his audacity in so doing, as also the assuming a sacred garb to cover his iniquities, have tempted me to lead him hither ere his imprisonment, to receive your just reproof."

Zabdi, for some moments, doubts that he is not really awake, but that he is abused by a dream. When he is assured that what passes is not an illusion, he turns to Phineas, saying—"Thou art a faithful officer, and thy zeal shall be rewarded. However, thou mayst now retire; the circumstances attending this delinquent are of such a nature, that,

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ere I proceed further, they must be considered of in secret."

Phineas withdrew; and Zabdi turning to Azor—"Infamous and cruel hypocrite!" said he, "never more insult me by thy presence!—Descend to the court of my palace, and from thence, at the dawn of day, begone from Babylon for ever; or be assured, I will myself denounce thee to the king, and procure for thee a torturing death."

Azor attempted not a reply, but left the presence of his former friend; while the latter calling to a trusty attendant, desired him to drive from his palace, before sunrise, the most execrable of mortals.

Zabdi's respect for holy orders, as also that attached to the shadow of former friendship, prevented him from bringing heavier punishment on the vile Azor: if weakness appeared in this conduct, it at least spoke the tenderness and generosity of his disposition; more instances than

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the present, however, were necessary to warn him of the dangerous consequences of issuing arrests upon ill-assured grounds.

Phineas, the next day, gave Absalom liberty, under promise that he would not mention, even to his wife, his knowledge of the events of the preceding evening.

Elnathan also, in his military command, gave too many tokens of the decline of his power; his proceedings were vacillating, and not marked with that entire decision which would have saved the empire from impending ruin; he, too, often gave way to the decisions of his coadjutors, who, in suppressing rebellion, often exercised cruelty and hasty revenge, in place of steady and undeviating justice: and now the sparks of rebellion passed from province to province, and a grand conflagration was kindling behind a thin screen, which neither the king nor his ministers had foresight to penetrate; morals, both in public and private, offered a picture the more depraved,

praved, as the king himself set the most shameful example; it became reprehensible for men to have more than two, or, at most, three children, by the woman to whom they were bourd in the chains of wedlock; the denominations of father, mother, and husband, were banished from polite circles, as containing something ridiculous. Gaming and luxury encreased from day to day.

At a time when the seeds of disorder were germinating so fast in Babylon, it may be supposed how anxious was Elnathan to preserve uncontaminated his sons, as also the son of Saaph. Sophonius yet remained at Athens; better had it been at Lacedæmon; but the Athenian morals began too much to resemble those of Babylon, for Evilmerodac not to give the preference to the former in the stationing of his embassy, to which the son of Elnathan was attached. Athens, no doubt, was the seat of glory and true

courage, but it was also that of pleasure and illicit love.

The archon Megacles, the wise Callophilus, and the virtuous and accomplished Aristea, the friends and tutors of Elnathan, had all paid the debt of nature. Aristea had educated with care two nieces, the youngest of whom, before her death, she had seen united to the youthful warrior Lithos, one of the bravest and most learned generals of the republic, but a young man of morals the most profligate in Athens. Beneath a captivating exterior and manners the most graceful, he concealed a soul hardened to every better sentiment; the peace of his mother, sister, wife, was sacrificed to wild ambition and selfish enjoyments; Nicea was the most miserable of women, even while she carried in her bosom the pledge of conjugal ties.

It was at this interesting moment that Lithos quitted her, to pass three years at

Babylon.

Babylon. Nicea was seen, admired, and pitied by Sophonius, now in his twenty-seventh year, who offered her, in the name of friendship, constant attentions, meant to console and cheer her disappointment. Nicea received them as a balm, and beneath their influence, was able to give birth to a son, who was to perpetuate the name of Lithos. The cares of Sophonius still continued; and to this infant, for the sake of its mother, he acted the part of that father who listened not to the tender voice of Nature: he answered its smiles, he mingled his caresses with those of its tender and delighted mother, and contributed, with her, to every means that could promote its health and perfect growth.

The world was not now such a desert for Nicea—her friend and her child invited returning smiles on her countenance; and the happier she grew, and the more grateful was she to each of those objects, the more tenderly did she

 welcome

welcome their presence, and join them in every pursuit and pleasure.

Nicea was yet young, and possessed no small share of personal charms: her figure partook of all the excellence described by the models of those days; her complexion was fair, and there was a languishing softness in her features that breathed of love: she was besides, from having been the pupil of Aristea, accomplished in mind, and was an agreeable and charming companion. How dangerous then for Sophonius to listen to the constant expressions of her gratitude, and to feel it exercised towards him in a thousand winning ways! to see her clasp her infant to her bosom, and the next moment gather those caresses from its spotless form! to feel himself almost the only protector of creatures so interesting!—However his stoicism might have been preserved, in such a case, in Sparta, it was scarcely to be expected that, at Athens, he would not part with it.

Nicea, according to the privilege of her son, was better able than Sophonius to mark the progress of a tender passion, one born without effort, which agitates the human heart without its knowledge of the spring, that so gently moves it, which respects, fears, desires, which dares not avow itself, much less express aloud its feelings. If Nicea, however, perceived that such a one had crept into the bosom of Sophonius, she remained silent, in the uncertainty of whether she did not share the agitations that so sweetly quickened his heart.

But at length—Ah! aid me to trace, with indulgence, the blameable wanderings of a blind passion, ye mortals, truly tender and timid! who, for a length of time, were unable to avow your flame to the object of your worship; who tried a thousand forms to clothe your confession ere you could hazard it; and who afterwards drew floods of tears from your mistresses, and owed your final victory only

to repeated prayers and sighs!—Yes; Nicea rendered Sophonius completely happy, and became so herself (if indeed the short-lived pleasures of sense, condemned by wisdom, religion, and social order, could give happiness), without either being able to account to the other for the progressive and even precipitate manner in which they had broke through every obstacle that opposed their illegitimate union. Blindness, intoxication, slumbering modesty—such were the auxiliaries by which a secret, but ungovernable passion, rendered guilty the passionate Sophonius, and the too tender and grateful Nicea.

Days which guilt has snatched from virtue, are surely succeeded by dark and tempestuous nights. Nicea too soon felt that she was again destined to become a mother; she shuddered, and confided her alarms to Sophonius, who shared not her regret in secret, but dared to glory in her prospect. The lovers, however, concerted

concerted means to hide from the universe the consequences of their weakness, and to save the shame that must follow its publication.

Towards the eighth month of her pregnancy, which Nicea had hitherto been able to conceal in Athens, she departed with her sister, for some baths, at a short distance from thence. They had passed there one day; on the succeeding, the companion of Nicea was to return to the capital of Attica, while she herself intended, in eight days, secretly to repair to a solitary dwelling, situated in the midst of a forest, there, watched by a faithful friend of her lover's, to bring to life, and repose on the bosom of retirement, the fruit of their guilty loves. The night previous to her proposed departure from the baths, she was visited by Sophonius: having soothed and lulled her cares, by his unexpected visit and the tenderness of his converse, he retired to rest; but was presently awoke by a

slave of Nicea's, who requested of him to hasten to her mistress.

"My dear friend," said Nicea, "events succeed not to our foresight—I am on the eve of becoming a mother; haste then, I pray thee, and relate to my sister the cause of our unhappy love, and its terrible consequences; she will come perhaps, and shield me from the punishment I merit—eternal obloquy."

Sophonius was surprised and shocked; he lost not a moment, however, in obeying the wishes of his beloved. Happily the sister of Nicea had observed too much of the world's malignity, not to have learned that indulgence towards others, and more especially towards our kindred, is the fairest, as it is the most rare of virtues: she listened with sorrow, but with pity, to Sophonius; and immediately followed him to the bedside of Nicea, and secured every means for her safety and concealment.

Nicea gave birth to a son, which tasted

but a few short moments of life—"Ah, my child!" cried Sophonius, through tears of regret, and looking on his babe, "would that I could have saved thee! thou wouldst have been dear to me ever!"

The unhappy mother is no sooner informed, by these words, that her infant is no more, than shrieks of grief and despair burst from her; to these succeed a swoon, from which her recovery is long doubtful.

At this painful period, Sophonius, who now stood in the place of the Chaldean envoy recalled to Babylon, receives intelligence that deputies from Thebes await his presence at Athens, on affairs of importance. Though difficult the task, he stifles the anxieties of love, and hastens to the call of duty; first encouraging his mistress, for his sake, to live, and adopt every possible means for her recovery.

In three hours, his steeds transport him to Athens, where, in the midst of a crowd

and of state affairs, he endeavours to conceal the impatience and anxiety of his heart.

He was, the next day, doing the honours of the banquet to the Theban councillors, when it was notified to him, that the physician whom he had dispatched to the recovery of Nicea was returned. Alas! Sophonius has no other idea but his beloved has breathed her last! He still, however, dissembles his agony till the conclusion of the entertainment, when he flies to the house of his skilful friend, to learn the worst. The physician tells him that Nicea yet lives, but that her state is truly precarious.

Sophonius instantly set off to catch her parting breath. Nicea revived, and for some time gave hopes of returning health; but regret for her infant, and remorse for having violated her marriage-vow, so mingled with love in her bosom, and produced there a canker so deep, that she gradually sunk into a lingering state,

which

which not all the fondness of her lover could rouse her from. Sophonius (in whose heart dwelt honour and virtue), though, of late, led astray by temptation, beheld with anguish the wreck he had made; he would willingly have given his life to save Nicea, and restore to her her stolen peace; but, alas! no—during a visit he was obliged to make to Corinth, her cares ended; and he had the mortification to learn, even by a letter from Lithos (who was now returned from his travels), the heart-breaking intelligence.

Sophonius wept bitterly the death of Nicea, and long preserved for her a tender remembrance; but it is not for the heart of man, when hope is past, to be long rendered miserable by his sensibility; for woman's tender, unoccupied existence, this is more peculiarly reserved.

Elnathan, who took care to be informed of the conduct of his son in every particular, thought proper to profit by the void left in his heart by the death of Ni-

cea, to forward his union with Zara, and on this account he had Sophonius recalled from Babylon. This was not the age, when the least infidelity on the part of persons professing an early attachment, and destined to be united in Hymen's chains, would be looked upon as an unpardonable error.

After a little time, Zara claimed anew the preference of Sophonius; and Elnathan, unwilling that farther time or accidents should interrupt his views with regard to the establishment of his children, finally arranged, with the consent of all parties interested, not only the marriage of his eldest son with Zara, the daughter of Zabdi, but that of Azer, his next born, with Saba, the grandniece of Saphat; as also the union of Theena, his only daughter, with the sole offspring of Saaph and Mesron.

We cannot forbear to relate how much greater obstacles opposed the conclusion of the nuptials of Azer than those of Sophonius;

phonius: the attachment of the latter for Nicea could not be presumed durable, since she was already married; but slight pains might have freed the way for Saba being the wife of a much more distinguished lover than Azer.

It was at the opening of a new theatre, splendid beyond conception, and on issuing from it, that the lovely Saba, descending a flight of stairs leading to the outer-door, missed her steps, and falling headlong, might have lost her life, had she not been protected by Belshazzar, heir to the throne, who extended his arms to save her. The terror and confusion of Saba heightened the bloom of her complexion, which, with her artless and half-uttered expressions of gratitude, and perhaps some slight disorder in her dress, concurred to excite emotions in the prince, which made him rejoice in having assisted an object so interesting. The impression made on him continued, and the

the charms of Saba floated round him in sleep. At an early hour next morning, he sought the society of Mara, and inquired, with no trifling anxiety, after the health of her ward, who indeed had suffered no prolonged inconvenience from her accident. Saba was present at the entrance of the prince, whose eyes were rivetted on her. Perceiving beside her a lute—"Beauteous Saba," said he, "do you add to other charms, the merit of playing on this instrument? if so, favour me, I request, with an example of your talent."

Mara, anxious to display her pupil's accomplishments, seconded the desire of the prince; and Saba, with grace and sweetness, sung and played the Deliverance of Iphigenia by Achilles.

She had long ceased, while the prince yet dwelt, in silent rapture, on those lips from whence emanated sounds sweet and overpowering. His thanks were at length

rapturously

rapturously expressed; and, ere his departure, he requested permission of Mara to repeat his visits to her.

During three months, the passion of Belshazzar was daily heightened, by seeing or reflecting on the graces of Saba; and he formed the resolution of uniting himself to her, by the purest and most sacred of ties. To this end he sent for Elnathan, and made an open avowal of his pretensions; at the same time offering excuses for his design of rivalling Azer, and promising hereafter to exalt him and Elnathan to the utmost, would they but favour his passion.

Elnathan combatted, with wisdom and respect, the inclinations of Belshazzar, and attempted to urge the inconvenience of his exalting a subject to his throne, instead of some great princess of Europe or Asia.

"I love!" said Belshazzar sternly—"brave not then my displeasure."

Alas! Elnathan was in his decline, and thence

thence attached, though unconsciously, to habits of splendour, and to ministerial influence—" Prince," he replied, " although it was the express wish of Saphat, whose memory I revere, that Saba should become the wife of my son, to her I leave it to decide on your offers: should she accept them, my entire approbation shall follow."

Where, in the meanwhile, was Azer? Precisely three months previous to the present time, he had gone to seek glory in a foreign land; nor was his pursuit vain. In a desperate naval combat between the Medes and the Iberians, the latter of whom were supported by the maritime forces of Babylon, Azer, as the Chaldean commander, decided the victory by prodigies of valour and skill; but unhappily he received a wound in his chest, of which it was long ere he recovered. It was but partly healed, when he accidentally received intimation of the attentions shewn Saba by the heir to the

the throne: love and jealousy were kindled to fury within his breast, and resigning his command to his deputy, he hastened home, under pretence of recovering his health. He arrived at Babylon in the evening, under a close disguise, when he was informed that, the same night, Elnathan was to give a splendid concert, at which was to appear Belshazzar, as the future husband of Saba.

Azer resolved to retain his disguise, and mingling amongst the crowd at the house of his father, silently observe the conduct of his mistress, and what grounds there were to credit the report of her approaching union with the prince. He readily accomplished his scheme: the prince was indeed present, and the eyes of Azer were stedfastly fixed on him, particularly during the interludes of the entertainment. The gardens behind the mansion were splendidly illuminated, and the entrance to them thrown open. It was between one of the acts of the concert,

cert, then, that Azer followed the steps of Belshazzar, who pursued Saba within a shady recess, whither she had encaged some nightingales.

"It seems, Saba," said the prince, "that here is a young progeny, who are thy peculiar care?—How enviable their lot!"

"Ah!" replied Saba, "these birds are yet so young, and the food I give them is perhaps so improper, that I almost fear they will die."

"Could I breathe my sentiments into them," replied Belshazzar, "their last sigh should be of gratitude."

"Gratitude, prince! Ah! you wish to remind me how much I owe you!—Yet surely you cannot believe that I can ever cease to feel a lively sense of it towards you?"

"Will you then, lovely Saba, shew your gratitude for love, the purest and most sincere, and deign to become my wife?"

"Prince,

"Prince, you are not ignorant that one of our first virtues is to respect the last wishes of our parents and guardians; and you also, I believe, know, that my great-uncle Saphat, to whom I owed the first obligations, prescribed to me, at the day of his death, certain laws which I cannot violate, without failing in my duty."

"Alas! I fear that the laws prescribed by your heart are still more pressing than those issued by Saphat—Your passion for Azer——"

"Noble Belshazzar, I am yet unacquainted with passion; still my purest enjoyments are in the constant remembrance of my early friendships. I might perhaps be sensible of livelier and more rapturous joys, but nothing can persuade me that there exists any safer, or more affecting."

Saba pronounced these words in a tone of firmness that enchanted Azer, who overheard the discourse. Unable to contain

tain himself, he flung from him his exterior garment, bent his knee, and drawing forth his scymitar, laid it at the feet of the royal heir—"Prince," said he, "there is nothing in Chaldea which I have a right to dispute with you;" and laying open his breast, he added—"But, pierce afresh this wound, received in securing the glory of Evilmerodac and yourself, that, ere you clasp in your embrace my dear Saba, I may no longer be a witness on earth."

Saba was astonished at this apparition; but collecting herself, she knelt, and pointing to Azer, said—"Sire, here is my lover and my husband! A great prince, like thee, was not born to be either my tyrant or my slave!"

The son of Evilmerodac regarded for a moment, in silence, the two suppliants, who hung upon his looks; then taking a hand of each, he assisted them to arise, and led them into the concert-room, where he ordered the musicians to sing the famous cantata which celebrates the constancy

constancy of Jacob for Rachel, and the happy union that awaited them.

Eight days after this event, the three unions projected by Elnathan were celebrated within the temple on mount Anoth, with rural pomp, in presence of the parents and nearest friends of the affianced couples; even Moria, notwithstanding her age and love of retirement, repaired to witness the blessings bestowed by Naaman on the children of her friends.

Mara perceived the strength of her mother so visibly decline, that she peremptorily resolved on remaining with her, should she refuse to accompany her to Babylon. Moria, unwilling to separate Mara from her husband, reluctantly took leave of her neighbours; and bidding an eternal farewell to her peaceful dwelling, repaired to breathe her last under the roof of her daughter, at Babylon. Notwithstanding the unremitting cares and attentions she there received,

her

her life could not be prolonged for more than six months. Her last moments were serene, for she expired in the hope of a blessed immortality. Elnathan, Zabdi, with their wives and children, shed tears over her remains, as they saw them laid within the tomb prepared for her by the worthy Eubulus.

Chœreas and Susanna extended their career somewhat longer; their death was at length marked by the same peace and hope, as had been that of Moria's. They were successively attended, in their last moments, by the same affectionate group (to which was added a son of Sophonius and Zara) as had watched her last sigh, and their remains were alike honoured by tears and sacrifices.

Elnathan and Zabdi approached their twelfth lustre, or sixtieth year, as Evil-merodac (become an object of horror and disgust for even the licentious) sunk into the tomb. The two ministers, notwithstanding occasional periods of hap-

piness,

piness, endured, during the latter part of the reign of this monarch, an infinity of inquietudes, that embittered their decline: they had to suffer the ill-concealed jealousy of courtiers, the murmurs of the people, which, as yet, dared not address the throne, but were uttered against the weakened administration; they were loudly blamed for placing to advantage their children, or rewarding their patriotic endeavours; even these children procured uneasiness for their parents, by unreasonable pretensions to favour, and frequent discontents, little known in the peaceful days of Abessalom and Noëma.

Belshazzar now mounted the throne of Babylon, and displayed a character unsoiled by the vices of his father: he was remarkable for his learning, benevolence, and adherence to the Mosaic law, even in the midst of general impiety; if imbecility marked his government, he gave an example of courage and fortitude, in personal

personal calamities, rarely equalled. Elnathan and Zabdi, however, were no longer favourites at court; the insinuations of artful courtiers, and that vanity, or love of power, which sets young monarchs in opposition to the measures of their predecessors, had excited prejudices against them in the mind of Belshazzar, who at length placed his confidence in persons much less deserving, and whose counsels completed the destruction of the empire.

If a decrease of sensibility did not attend upon declining life, how poignant would have been the feelings of Elnathan and Zabdi, to see themselves at length slighted by their prince, after a long and arduous attendance on public duty! an attendance, for which they had cheerfully resigned many a day and year that could have been more happily devoted to the pleasures of private life, particularly from the period when they had

had reached their prime, when the desires of ambition become somewhat blunted!

Upon the death of Evilmerodac, Sephora and Mara would willingly have induced their husbands to retire from the theatre of the world, and, forgetting the ingratitude of men and the shifting scenes of a court, spend, in ease and noble retirement, the remainder of their life within their native valley; but Elnathan and Zabdi could not agree to so decisive a measure; the interests of their children, they also thought, required that they should not wholly relinquish their hold at the helm of public affairs. Instead, therefore, of resigning their stations, they took every means of appearing insensible to the slights offered them; well knowing that the surest way of exciting the contempt of the multitude, is timidly to meet the frowns of fortune. To lull the jealousy of the court minions, who regarded them in the light of censors

and enemies to pleasure, as well as to gain the applause of all ranks, they resolved on giving a splendid *fête*: in this they were seconded by the wishes of their sons, who were rather inclined to reproach their parsimony, and who, having drawn breath amidst artificial scenes, cherished the love of shew and of vain pleasures, beyond what their parents had done at the same age, and under the auspices of Abessalom and Noëma.

On a day that had been signified, the doors of the splendid mansion of Elnathan and Zabdi (for they had ever resided together) were thrown open, and every gratification prepared, which money could purchase or modesty permit. Numbers of idle personages, whose life was consumed in dispelling vapours by a search after pleasure; others, whom envy, masked by politeness, engaged as spies, to ridicule and detract from their superiors in rank and fortune; in short, a limited number of friends were seen to enter. Music, fireworks,

fireworks, various games, and ingenious surprises, were succeeded by a ball, where all the company appeared masked—a species of amusement scarcely to be commended, since it gives room for the ill-natured and satirical to find their enjoyment in wounding the innocent and unsuspecting, and where a dangerous licence, subversive of modesty, is granted to the young and less virtuously inclined.

When the pleasures of the dance had appeared sufficiently prolonged, the banqueting-hall, splendidly illuminated, was thrown open, and tables displayed, covered with delicacies the rarest and most exquisite; amidst which burned, at certain distances, in transparent vases, the most delicious perfumes. Every one was now required to abandon their mask, when the surprise of Sophonius and Azer (who, during the evening, had closely followed two masks, that charmed them by the choice of their dress, the

 elegance

elegance of their forms, and the brilliancy of their conversation) became extreme.

Sophonius approached the fair object, with whom he had indulged his raillery, and who was a young Grecian, that had arrived at Babylon the preceding day, and was unknown to all except her husband, who conducted her to the assembly—"Those features," said Sophonius, "are familiar to me; that voice too—May I ask, in what clime, and under what auspices, thy beauty was brought to bloom?"

The reply of the lady informed him, that she was daughter to the eldest sister of his once-loved Nicea.

"Ah!" said he, after a moment's silence, and having repressed a tear, "my heart was true when I followed thy traces! Do you not recollect Sophonius, who so often sported with thee in thy youth?"

The Greek immediately recognized her former

former acquaintance. The impression made on Azer was yet more lively, and of a nature more comic.

Saba had, of late, observed that, if the heart of her husband remained constant to her, his imagination was inclined to rove; she therefore, at the commencement of the dance, retired for a moment with one of her friends, who wore a tasteful and elegant dress, and exchanged it with her for the one she then wore, with the knowledge and approbation of Azer. Thus newly metamorphosed, she sought out her husband; and by some well-imagined movements, which he supposed involuntary, attracted his attention. Azer was ensnared, and ceased not to compliment the graces of the charming mask, who had deigned to glance at him: wit[h] her he danced, nor would choose a[n]other partner.—Psyche had never mo[ved] with a grace so divine; with her als[o] alone conversed—Minerva posses[sed] a judgment so ripe; when with his

mask he jested, Aspasia, or Thalia herself, had never replied with equal sallies. At length, fatigued with endeavours to please, he sat down to table, to invent new means. The company unmasked; Azer opened wide his eyes, to behold the features of the divinity who had enslaved him—it was his wife!

Soft melody presided over the conclusion of the repast, and every visitor who had sought pleasure solely, retired completely satisfied; such as entered with envy at their heart, stifled it ere their return home.

Elnathan, Zabdi, and Sephora, were delighted with the success of their entertainment; Mara murmured towards the conclusion—"It is all very fine," said she; "but hence our duties, our toils, and our purest sentiments, become tiresome; and hence it is that expence is lavished, to the prejudice of the poor. Shortly, my dear Zabdi, and you, Elnathan, will have entered your sixty-fifth year;

year; Sephora, and I too, want but little to complete old age—I wonder if we shall all become wiser."

END OF VOL. II.

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